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# briarpatch

FIERCELY INDEPENDENT



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revolutionary  
front p.13

## Striking Back

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# Committed to Community





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# briarpatch

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## a radical imagination

*"They tell us we are dreamers. The true dreamers are those who think things can go on indefinitely the way they are."*

– Slavoj Žižek, speaking to Occupy Wall Street demonstrators gathered at Liberty Plaza in Lower Manhattan.

As this issue goes to press, protests inspired by Occupy Wall Street have taken hold in well over 1,000 cities across North America and beyond, including nearly every major city in Canada. What began as an encampment of a few hundred people in the heart of New York City's financial district on September 17th has erupted into a popular movement that continues to capture the imagination and sympathies of growing numbers of people. This nascent movement has become a lightning rod for their collective anger over a system in which those responsible for the current economic crisis continue to rake in record profits while the rest of us endure unrelenting austerity measures.

At a time of pervasive defeatism and paralysis on the radical left, this movement has caught many by surprise, and inspired hope in the possibility of a turning point. Flawed and fragmented though it may be, the Occupy movement can't help but feel historically significant, particularly as diverse communities rooted in histories of struggle and those most affected by the current crisis carve space within and alongside it.

Among those who've joined the ranks of the Occupy movement is organized labour, beginning with the refusal of bus drivers from the 30,000-strong New York Transport Workers Union to ferry arrested demonstrators to jail. Since then, unions ranging from the United Steelworkers to National Nurses United and the Service Employees International Union, collectively representing hundreds of thousands of workers, have pledged their support for Occupy Wall Street and taken to the streets.

The support of unions is not merely an extension of solidarity to demonstrators. As the spokesperson for New York's transit workers explains, "We view the protests as young people who are articulating the same kind of things that we've been trying to articulate."

As the Occupy movement continues to gather momentum, this moment presents an opportunity to re-evaluate the role of unions in social transformation and look beyond the reactive task of simply defending the working conditions of their members within the capitalist system, to which much of the labour movement has become resigned. Moreover, it has opened a window to forge new alliances at a time when the need for cross-movement solidarity is dire.

Organized labour is under sustained attack across Canada, as evidenced by both provincial and federal legislation undermining the right to organize, to bargain collectively,

and to strike. As Hans Rollman writes in this issue, the use of back-to-work legislation to force an end to, or even preempt, labour disputes on terms favourable to employers has become the new norm, calling into question the future of labour's single most powerful tactic: the strike.

As Tracey Mitchell describes in the following pages, legislative attacks have been accompanied by a public relations war on unions in which "right-wing governments and conservative media are succeeding in playing the average worker against the union worker, who is typically portrayed as cash-grabbing and lazy."

In a context where only three out of ten workers are unionized (the numbers are considerably worse for workers of colour, who are disproportionately concentrated in poorly paid, part-time and precarious jobs), the labour movement is losing its ability to enforce minimum standards in wages and benefits across both unionized and non-unionized workplaces, and is indeed challenged to justify its relevance to non-unionized workers.

How will we resist becoming further categorized and divided, and build the relationships of mutual support and solidarity necessary to realize the potential of our collective power?

As Dave Bleakney writes in his post-mortem of the recent postal strike and ensuing lock-out, "at times such as strikes, the need for support and solidarity from the community is clear. But what are we doing to foster these relationships in between moments of crisis? And what is the labour movement, in turn, doing to support the communities that we are all part of? Why do we not have a labour movement that stands with G20 prisoners, rounded up and brutalized in what has now become a rote activity of police repression at summits everywhere? Why do we celebrate the culture of Aboriginal peoples, the drumming and the ceremonies, but not their militant struggles?"

As scholar and activist Vijay Prashad recently wrote in reference to the Occupy Wall Street movement, goodwill alone cannot overcome the divisions among us, upon which capitalism has built itself. They must be actively struggled against, while we continue to welcome more people, "bringing with them their many complaints and dreams." Our movement "must promise more to each of us than what is available in the present... it must breathe in the many currents of dissatisfaction, and breathe out a new radical imagination."

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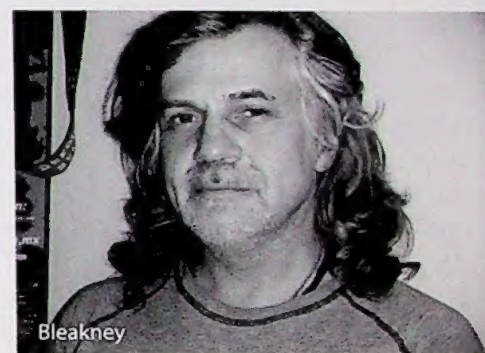
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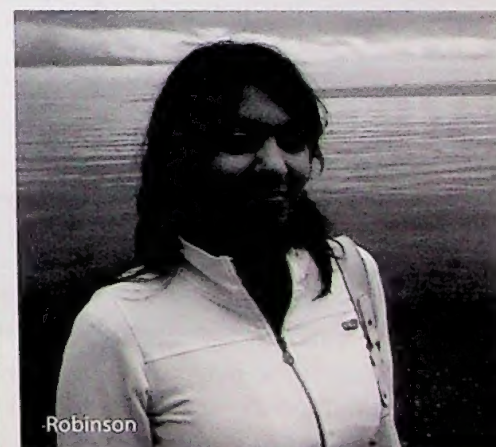
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Dewi Oka



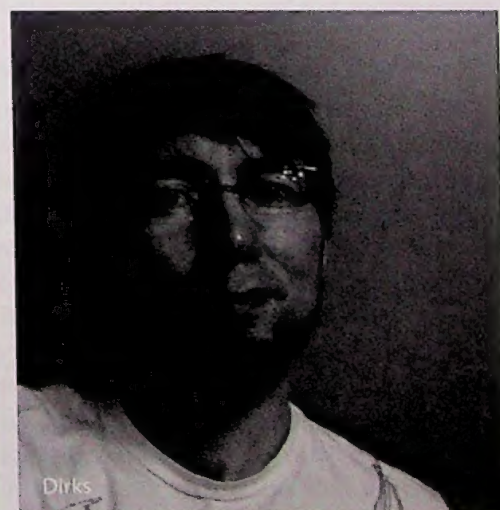
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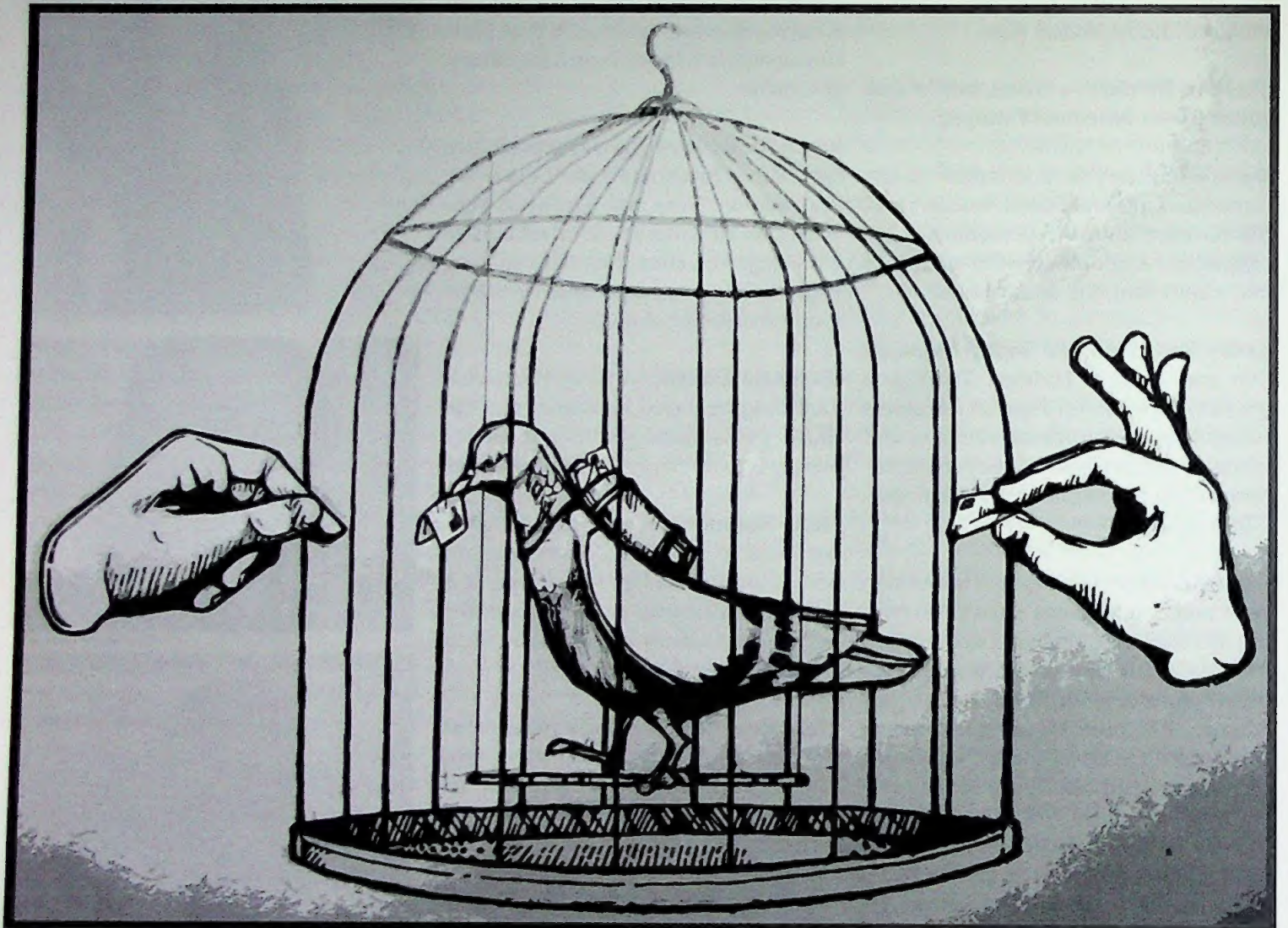


Mitchell



Dirks





DAVE RON



# The confines of compromise

*Has the labour movement become comfortable in a reactive, and even survivalist, mode of operating? What would a labour movement that strengthened and encouraged resistance and militancy, rather than managed it, look like? Reflecting on the recent postal strike and ensuing lockout, Dave Bleakney makes the case for a new approach to labour activism.*

Canada Post is a public sector success story. As a steadily profitable state-owned enterprise, it provides postal service to communities across the country as well as roughly 54,000 jobs with mostly decent wages and benefits for workers. Its profits over the past 15 years have totalled almost \$2 billion. Yet Canada Post, with the support of its friends in Parliament, proceeded this year to eviscerate the wages, benefits and pensions of postal workers, with changes amounting to an 18 per cent wage reduction for new hires, reduced job guarantees and weaker sick leave provisions, to name a few.

After two weeks of rotating strikes by postal workers in June, Canada Post locked out its workers and suspended mail delivery countrywide, prompting the federal government to introduce back-to-work legislation. Despite assurances by the labour minister that an experienced person with a labour relations background would be appointed to arbitrate, a retired judge with no known experience in the field was chosen. Questions to the minister about his experience have gone unanswered.

After hours of NDP filibustering, wages and other terms of the employment contract were imposed by an act of Parliament. While some locals passed resolutions to defy the legislation, in the end this was not the option postal workers chose. Governments have become clever, ensuring that defiance will no longer mean jail time (and there is no shortage of workers willing to defy under those conditions) but rather economic terror in the form of massive daily fines ranging from \$1,000 per day for rank and file members to \$100,000 per day for the union.

This downward spiral of workplace austerity and declining bargaining power is not limited to postal workers. Similar neoliberal austerity programs are being implemented with ideological fervour across Canada in response to the failures of global capitalism. The rights of workers to resist these measures by collective bargaining, or through tactics such as the strike, are under sustained attack. Collective bargaining has increasingly become a hollow shell, a theatre, a staged moment in which the rights of workers steadily deteriorate.

This has placed trade unions in a reactive and survivalist mode of operating. Whether intentionally or otherwise, some have become comfortable with this mode of operation.

Postal workers (and most workers, for that matter) are in a bind. The rules have changed, but have we as a labour movement? For 65 years, the Rand formula has provided union structures and bureaucracies with a steady flow of revenue and recognition. It has also brought a kind of labour peace for bosses in which a narrow window of collective bargaining power for workers is permitted in return for management control of the work process. The notion of downing tools to settle a workplace dispute in the moment is mostly gone. Rank-and-file members no longer look to each other to deal with workplace harassment, but rather to legal advocates and meetings in offices far away from the source of the problem.

These rules were put in place not to benefit workers, but to confine and manage dissent and resistance. But now, even this process has been chipped away at so as to become almost meaningless. Perhaps it is time for us to revisit that post-war arrangement, just as bosses and politicians have. There are tough, and perhaps unpopular, questions that we must confront, and choices that we, as a movement, must make.

What lessons can be learned from the 2011 postal strike-turned-lockout in evaluating where we are as a movement?

## A periodic opening

For workers, a strike is a traumatic affair. It's also something of a roller-coaster ride. On the one hand, there are beautiful moments of community, defiance and celebration. But the bills remain, as do a host of other economic pressures.

Rank-and-file workers are at their most active when on strike. Those who never go to union meetings are hungry for more information. Members read bulletins, ask questions, show up on picket lines and engage in discussions. They demonstrate, and even join occupations.

Unions seem to miss this point, and continue to position themselves in the traditional, and largely outdated, striker-scab framework. While workers are on the lookout for non-



existent scabs (now called “replacement workers” in some labour circles), how might these periodic and emotional openings be used to increase member participation, analysis and militancy? What space is available for discussion among membership during this crucial time? Isn’t what happens after the strike equally or more important as what happened before and during the strike?

Strikes provide us with rare opportunities to build new models and more empowering practices in which people are meaningfully engaged, and where the labour movement can move beyond reproducing its defensive practices and its position as a victim of neoliberalism. The strike is not an end that we work toward, but another beginning. Harvesting the rare collective empowerment of such moments has to be a priority. What discussions can happen with rank-and-file members after the strike that do not limit us to placing our hopes in the judicial and parliamentary process?

Directly following the end of a strike there is a window of opportunity to hold these deeper and more critical discussions, to talk about the trauma, the uncertainty, the high moments and, most importantly, how we move forward. If we are to exercise our collective power over the long haul, we must ask tougher questions of ourselves and our practices while creating new spaces of engagement.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) developed a discussion module for rank-and-file members for this purpose. Only two locals out of more than 200 tried to use it. Why would they? Our practice and history has been mostly to react. Once the terms of back-to-work legislation or a negotiated settlement have been declared, we go back to work, file grievances, complain, and wait until the next big fight. And so the cycle continues.

Rather than meaningfully evaluating where we are at as a movement, we become victims, complaining again and again about what they are doing to us. Being a victim is very righteous; it absolves us of any responsibility and reduces the debate to one of bad guys and good guys. But does our self-victimization and our faith in parliamentary and judicial processes not ultimately serve to reproduce our own obedience? How can we act as proactive agents, defining and articulating our own demands, strategies and tactics, rather than retreating to reactive and survivalist politics?

### **From isolated victims to collective actors**

What might have happened if the modules designed by CUPW were used to provide space for these discussions to take place? And what might happen to the broader labour movement should our stifling structures and practices open up? Experiences in both Winnipeg and Edmonton indicate that when the calls were made, even at the last minute, postal workers showed up. In Winnipeg I attended a series of discussions where over 100 rank-and-file workers, some with less than one day’s notice, showed up for assemblies. Many had never been to a union meeting. They were caught up in the emotion of the moment, which was not about facts and details or talking heads but about their

**At times such as strikes, the need for support and solidarity from the community is clear. But what are we doing to foster these relationships in between moments of crisis? And what is the labour movement, in turn, doing to support the communities that we are all part of?**

experiences, critiques and questions. It was a space for them to talk, and not just listen, to a union leader.

Spaces such as these exist outside the domain of the local membership meeting and its hierarchical processes, expressions of power and internal bickering. Members of the union – the critical and the not-so-critical, including those who feel out of the loop, angry, or fearful about union meetings – can come together in a circle as a class of equals, where every word matters and differences of opinion are not silenced. These moments for open discussion are too few, but critical if we are going to grow a movement capable of fighting back.

In Edmonton, several hundred members attended a mass session in which they forced a resolution from the floor calling for defiance of back-to-work legislation through a general strike, and refusal to submit to the forced arbitration process. In other words, postal workers were willing to accept fines to raise the offensive. This is not insignificant. How could traditional labour serve to accelerate resistance and fearlessness such as this, rather than managing or avoiding it? Or do we believe the status quo actually works for us?

And what might have happened had community supporters – those who showed so much support and solidarity to postal workers – also been invited to these sessions? How could these moments have been used to broaden our base of support, and to support others in the community?

In some locals, members did not just remain on the picket lines but went door to door. They asked people to put up signs of support. Halifax was awash in CUPW support signs in windows and on lawns. Even mailboxes were decorated with public messages of support. It happened because union members used this moment to make direct contact with people in small businesses and communities. They chose not to strike in isolation from the larger community. They realized that face-to-face engagement can undo much of what the corporate media and ingrained myths deny us.

According to sociologist Heidi Rimke, “the left appears unable to understand the workings of power; it is a force relation rather than something that can be possessed or assigned, such as social status or class position. Power is not an object or something one holds, but something one does. Exercising individual and collective agency expresses power in multiple forms. The social relations of community are not based on sitting inside homes in physical isolation from one another, but rather talking to one another on the streets and anywhere that provides an opportunity to interact face-to-face.”



At times such as strikes, the need for support and solidarity from the community is clear. But what are we doing to foster these relationships in between moments of crisis? And what is the labour movement, in turn, doing to support the communities that we are all part of?

Why do we not have a labour movement that stands with G20 prisoners, rounded up and brutalized in what has now become a rote activity of police repression at summits everywhere? Why do we celebrate the culture of Aboriginal peoples, the drumming and the ceremonies, but not their militant struggles? And when we talk of "green jobs," what are we saying to small farmers around the world who see our environmental problem as a systemic destruction that cannot be recovered through greenwashing, or by maintaining economic hegemony in rich countries? Why are we fearful of having such discussions?

Rather than permitting ourselves to be categorized and divided, maybe it's time for us to re-examine the notion of sectoral bargaining in isolation from other unions, and from non-unionized workers. Why should unions act as sectors rather than as a class? Union local meetings are an important place to do union business, but this should not be our only venue. What would alternative forms of organizing, such as workplace and community assemblies, look like?

We have seen too many rallies and demonstrations through the years where the protesters and passers-by are in two separate worlds – the general public looking apathetic to protesters and protesters looking like some kind of cult to the passing public. Engagement in these moments is critical, something postal workers know very well. When we fight, we must fight for the community too. We can't allow these to be separate or unrelated struggles.

### With heads up high

At the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) convention in May 2011, there were dismally few hours of debate, accompanied by an uncomfortable air of conformity, fear, theatre, spectacle and self-censorship in the room. Incidentally, this was, according to CLC president Ken Georgetti, "one of the best CLC conventions ever." Contrary to the staged assemblies of labour aristocracy as the vanguard of worker aspirations, 21st-century unionism will require something more organic, where communities and people will no longer be organized in segregated units and sectors in competition and isolation. It will refuse to reproduce the same systems of division and denial that CEOs use to rob us. It will no longer pretend things can remain as they have been, or that a social democratic government could resolve our problems in a global economy.

In this economic roller coaster – one that only goes down for most of us – we must ask ourselves the question: do we wish to live in a society where we are jackals picking over the scraps? Or can our reactive culture, expectations and rhetoric be transformed into something more permanent and reflective of a larger movement? And can all of us, as national president Denis Lemelin said of CUPW members, "hold our heads up high"? **B**

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*A striking worker is arrested after defying back-to-work legislation used against Newfoundland and Labrador's public sector workers in 1986. Photo reprinted with permission from the archives of the Centre for Newfoundland Studies at Memorial University Libraries.*



# The end of the strike?

*The right to strike has been steadily undermined in recent decades by coercive labour legislation. In Newfoundland and Labrador, workers have responded in creative ways to defend hard-won tactics, and to devise new ones.*

By Hans Rollman

Less than two months into their majority mandate, the federal Conservatives passed legislation that left the Canadian labour movement reeling.

The Harper government's use of back-to-work legislation to force an end to labour disputes at Air Canada and Canada Post was just the latest blow, however, to the labour movement's most time-honoured tactic: the strike.

The use of strikes by unions to pressure employers in labour disputes has been steadily undermined in Canada in recent decades, not only by the use of coercive legislation to end – and at times pre-empt – strikes, but also by the increasing presence of transnational corporations (TNCs) with sufficient economic power to sit out strikes in a given country, or import replacement workers when local regulations allow.

In Newfoundland and Labrador – Canada's most highly unionized province – workers have responded to the gradual erosion of the strike as an effective tool of the labour movement in a number of ways, ranging from civil disobedience and defiance of government legislation, to creative proposals to transform traditional collective bargaining structures.

In this sense, the North Atlantic's labour movement demonstrates some of the creative ways workers are striking back against government efforts to smother their hard-won labour rights.

## Domestic norms, international condemnations

Use of government legislation to interfere in or terminate labour disputes is not new, but it has been used with growing frequency since the 1980s. A 2008 study revealed 179 cases where provincial or federal governments had passed laws that interfered with bargaining rights between 1982 and 2008 (85 of those were back-to-work legislation). And the legislating has intensified in recent years.

Leo Panitch has been following this trend with interest and concern. A professor of political science at York University in Toronto, he wrote, together with Donald Swartz, what's become a classic study of the phenomenon.

Their work puts Canada's record in international context. Since 1981, they observe, more complaints have been filed

against Canada by its unions than any other country in the world. Since the International Labour Organization's Freedom of Association Committee was created in 1951, only four countries – Argentina, Colombia, Peru and Greece – have faced more complaints than Canada. By 1991, more than one-third of all international labour complaints against G7 countries were filed against Canada. Many of these were the result of back-to-work legislation.

Use of back-to-work laws has become so commonplace in Canada that governments and the public alike are often oblivious to the singular reputation Canada has garnered internationally by disregarding global labour standards.

Panitch and Swartz coined a term for this: permanent exceptionalism. What was meant to be an exception – legislating workers back to work – has now become the permanent norm. "The result," says Panitch, "is a permanent dampening effect on the use of the strike."

## Defying the law

Newfoundland and Labrador's government has used back-to-work legislation a total of nine times since joining Canada in 1949. In many cases, this legislation has been met with defiance.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a number of union leaders, strikers and even sitting legislators served jail time for resisting and refusing to obey back-to-work and other restrictive legislation. One notable case was during a public sector strike in 1986. Passing legislation only made the strike more turbulent, as striking unions opted to defy the legislation. Hundreds were arrested, leading to justice department concerns that provincial prisons and police forces would be unable to handle the militant strikers if arrests continued.

Peter Fenwick was head of the provincial New Democratic Party and a member of the house of assembly during the 1986 strike. When back-to-work legislation was tabled by the provincial government, his party opposed it, much like the federal NDP opposed back-to-work legislation for Canada Post earlier this year. Unlike the federal NDP, however, he joined strikers in defying the legislation, knowing the act of civil disobedience could earn him a prison sentence. And it did.



"They had a prison full of public employees," he said, reflecting on the events 25 years later. "It seemed to me that the most effective way to protest was to join them on the picket line and help turn the sentiment against what the government was doing."

After his arrest, Fenwick was sentenced to two months in jail but was released after 20 days, remaining on probation for a year.

### **25 years later: a more complicated world**

**L**ana Payne is the current president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour. She says today's governments have made it tougher for unions to make the sort of principled protest that sent Fenwick to jail in 1986.

"In the past, labour leaders have defied legislation and gone to jail, but now governments have become smart. It's not the leaders they go after; it's the individual workers who get fined and charged. That's a difficult scenario for unions to deal with. It's hard for unions to expect their members to take this on individually," says Payne. "In the good old days it used to be the labour leader who faced the time and faced the fine."

But Payne raises another important point: being militant doesn't just mean getting arrested on a picket line.

"There are different types of militancy," she points out. "Brigitte DePape was pretty militant, and she just stood up with a 'Stop Harper' sign in Parliament. She didn't put up a picket line. Militancy can come in all kinds of forms: it can come on a picket line, it can come in the workplace. It's about taking opportunities and being smart about the kind of campaigns that we have around strikes so that it's not just us and the employer. How do you bring in the public and the community? How do you find other ways to pressure employers? Militancy is not just going to jail. There's all kinds of ways to express your power."

Expressing that power has taken a number of creative forms in Newfoundland and Labrador. During the sealers' strikes of the early 1800s, poor sealers, masked and under cover of darkness, stormed and destroyed the boat of a merchant who was trying to force them to give up cash payment and accept credit notes for their dangerous and back-breaking work.

In 1956, union organizers rented planes and parachuted into remote logging camps, bypassing company security blockades in order to reach and unionize the workers. Organizers used every possible strategy on land, sea and air to organize labour's power, with an enthusiasm that led a visiting Canadian labour representative to declare, shortly before Newfoundland joined Canada in 1949, that the capital of St. John's was "the most organized [unionized] city I have ever seen."

In 2005 the Fish, Food and Allied Workers (FFAW) organized almost two straight months of protest over policy changes to the fishery that included occupation of government offices and harbour blockades. One of the highlights of that strike occurred when a Portuguese trawler tried to

cross the blockade. The blockading union vessels pursued and surrounded it, holding it at sea for four hours in what they dubbed a "fishermen's arrest." Combining the charged public issue of foreign overfishing with the union's demands helped the union boost public support. Even normally conservative local media applauded the move, and ratings for wildly popular premier Danny Williams dropped to their lowest levels.

"For over 20-odd straight days, we blockaded the house of assembly," recalled FFAW staffer John Boland. "There was a fair bit of civil disobedience. I think we probably pushed the line with a lot of it. At one time, we had seven or eight court injunctions out against us. My wife said to me, 'One day pretty soon, when you wake up the only place you'll be allowed to strike is at home!'"

"At one point we blocked a shipping lane and had 14 ocean-going oil tankers just stranded at sea, unable to land. We had a blockade of St. John's Harbour on the go for five or seven days. Unfortunately a lot of people said that's against the law, and I guess it is, but when times get tough we roll up our sleeves. If I look at the history of the labour movement, it wasn't built on workers being nice people. Nice people were set aside and ignored."

### **Transnationals: the new challenge**

**I**n addition to increasingly coercive governments siding with employers, the growing presence of transnational corporations, many of them headquartered outside of Canada, has also contributed to undermining the power of the strike.

Steelworkers employed by Brazilian mining giant Vale in Voisey's Bay, N.L., learned that in 2009. Workers at the company's mines in both Voisey's Bay and Sudbury, Ont., went on strike that year, and for the Labrador workers it was a strike that lasted two years.

It was only after the Newfoundland and Labrador government launched an inquiry into the reasons for the ongoing strike that a settlement was reached. The Newfoundland Federation of Labour had denounced Vale's use of replacement workers as a violation of free collective bargaining, and called on government to use other tools in the Labour Relations Act – such as use of mediators – to bring it to a close. When these failed to bear fruit, the government inquiry was launched.

The resulting report, known as the Roil Report, called for significant changes to labour relations in the province. It cautioned that TNCs disrupt traditional labour relations models since they have such disproportionate power compared to unions. It also recommended that government implement new rules to regulate labour relations with TNCs: mandatory arbitration boards and imposition of collective agreements where existing labour relations methods have completely failed (while protecting the general right to strike), quicker grievance hearings, and further research on the role of replacement workers, or "scabs." But probably its greatest impact lies in giving public voice to the fact that labour relations need a level playing field.



"Roil is a very good summary of what happens in jurisdictions where TNCs have incredible power," says Payne. "How do you change laws to ensure the rights we believe we have are still there and have the same meaning as when they were first introduced? That's really the challenge, because the economy has changed substantially in the last three decades, but the laws have not changed to keep up with the economy as it is now, which is one with TNCs. And they are really game changers. We don't have the same balance of power at the bargaining table when they can close a workplace down for a year and it has very little impact on their bottom line because they have operations around the world."

Panitch finds the report's conclusions interesting, but cautions that every situation is different. "Some have argued that with TNCs, if you strategically strike in one place, you can shut the whole operation down."

Whatever unions do, Panitch says, they're going to have to do it quickly. "I think the smashing of public sector unions is on the agenda. And I don't just think it's Canada. It's everywhere."

### **Instead of picket lines, work-ins?**

**I**n a creative article published last year, Sam Gindin, York University Packer Visitor in Social Justice, and Michael Hurley, vice-president for the Ontario wing of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), argued for a novel idea. As part of a wider range of tactics designed to expand collective bargaining, they suggested workers stage "work-ins." For instance, health- or long-term care workers could pick a day to all come in to highlight worker shortages. Social workers could meet with welfare recipients to discuss their mutual frustrations with how programs operate. They note that the Public Service Alliance of Canada did this when employment insurance rules were recently tightened. They prepared pamphlets to inform recipients about how to avoid being cut off.

Such acts would improve service and demonstrate very clearly what unions have been arguing: more public service workers means better public services. Moreover, workers themselves would organize these tasks and thus start taking control of the workplace out of the hands of employers and putting it back into the hands of the workers. If employers don't like it, their only option would be to kick out the workers, reducing the quality of service and generating public backlash against the employer – not the striking worker.

Panitch thinks the idea is one that should be taken seriously. "It raises the question not only of showing up at work, but also beginning to take responsibility for the labour process. A lot of workers don't like to do this because they think that's management's job. But a work-in could show how much better services could be if there were additional staff, how many fewer accidents there would be in nursing homes, how much better patients in hospital would feel about being there, and what have you."

Panitch feels part of the problem is that strikes have become associated almost exclusively with wages, and that's

### **The Post-War Compromise**

The post-Second-World-War system of labour relations in Canada was in many ways built on acceptance, if not constitutional recognition, of the right to strike. What labour historians refer to as the "post-war compromise" involved a tacit understanding between unions, employers and government that unions would give up wildcat strikes and disruptive workplace strategies in exchange for legal, binding recognition of their unions and the collective bargaining process – including the legal right to strike when duly scheduled bargaining produced no agreement between the employer and the union. Pitted against employers whose financial resources and political influence far outweighed those of the workers, refusal to work and the ability to bring workplace activity to a halt was considered by many unions to be the only leverage they had, and the only way to ensure both parties could negotiate terms with each other from a fair, if not equal, playing field.

not all of what it should be about. "It isn't just about getting more in order to keep up your standard of living. It's that, but it's also an expression of frustration with regard to the lack of interest and control over one's work. And it's always been that. But the easiest thing to bargain is wages. It's much harder to transform the deeply authoritarian nature of the workplace."

### **Is there any point?**

**W**ith governments so willing to intervene in favour of corporations, is there still any point to going on strike?

Panitch thinks there is, but warns unions need to recognize public attitudes toward strikes and be strategic in their use. "There are smart strikes, and there are dumb strikes. And you choose times that are good to strike and bad to strike. And you need to conduct strikes in such a way that you're not alienating the populace of the city. I think even if you know that you're going to be legislated back, if it's part of a mobilizing strategy where it's going to carry your members' notions of consciousness and solidarity and understanding of the state further, it may be worth doing."

On the other hand, he points to the CUPE municipal workers' strike in 2009, which he feels contributed to the strengthening of right-wing sentiment in Toronto and the election of Rob Ford and other conservative candidates to city council.

Ultimately, he says, unions need to make decisions on a case-by-case basis. "I don't think there's ever a ready recipe for every instance. I think people do need to make sacrifices sometimes if they think it'll have a galvanizing effect."

Payne also feels that striking remains an important form of action for unions. "We're facing a government that declared a war on the labour movement," she says. "We have to keep doing what it is what we do, and always be looking for ways to step it up." **B**





SHANTALA ROBINSON



# Homeplace as Revolutionary Front

## Taking “care” back into our hands

By Cynthia Dewi Oka

*“For those who dominate and oppress us benefit most when we have nothing to give our own, when they have so taken from us our dignity, our humanness that we have nothing left, no ‘homeplace’ where we can recover ourselves.”*

— BELL HOOKS

Homeplace is where we are grown and raised into social beings, where we receive our earliest definitions of humanity, where we first learn to recognize love, violence, justice and pain. Yet it has persisted in our imagination as a private sphere of emotional and material dependence, rather than as a front in revolutionary struggle. The practices that constitute it, like caregiving, child rearing and homekeeping (broadly, mothering), are still regarded as the domain of individual women whose labours are often taken as much for granted by radical communities as by the market economy. The skills, strategies and bodies of mothers/caregivers are rarely present in spaces where political problems are defined and decisions made. Yet the survival of capitalism has fundamentally required the colonization of activities, relationships and physical spaces associated with home. Indeed, home is where human bodies are made into, or resist becoming, obedient subjects of capitalist rule.

The capture of home has taken place through state-sponsored practices, historically targeting Indigenous communities and communities of colour, including physical displacement and expropriation of land, laws preventing marriage during slavery, marriage laws dispossessing Indigenous women of Indian status, the appropriation of children from their families through sale or

residential schools, forced sterilizations and so on. In the past century, these techniques have shifted toward, among others, mass incarceration, compulsory contraception, child apprehensions and adoption policies transferring mass numbers of racialized children into white families, and the forced separation of women in the South from their children when they are driven abroad to find work. These state interventions have been instrumental in breaking autonomous generational processes that could educate and nourish human beings capable of opposing capitalist logic.

While theft of land, resources and labour enabled early European capitalists to rob poor folks and people of colour of their material capacity to survive independently of capitalist rule, the destruction of home spaces was designed to destroy our resources for socializing future generations on our own terms. The autonomous home, in other words, is a threat to capitalism.

Within this framework, we need to question what it means to expect the state to protect or provide for mothers/caregivers and their dependents. Historically, feminist movements (led by predominantly middle-class, white women) have appealed to the state for voting rights, protection against abusive husbands, the equalization of their educational and employment opportunities with (white) men's, and support

for single mothers. With the rise of neoliberalism, the state has neutralized feminist pressure by increasingly contracting out “women's issues” to non-profit organizations. This work includes women facilitating other women's entry into a network of state services, regulations and surveillance. De-privatization of the domestic sphere has thus meant an awkward marriage between the state and feminism. And while women might be better positioned to escape individual abusers, they do not necessarily become more able to defend the home from those forces that compelled them to live with violence in the first place.

I am often asked if I think we should demand wages for mothering so that mothers/caregivers can be economically independent and secure. After much reflection, my answer is still no. Absolutely, unpaid mothering subsidizes the capitalist economy. Mothers do not benefit from any kind of recognition as people who work, and often have to work double or triple shifts to make ends meet, especially as single mothers. As many feminists have argued, women have been disciplined into accepting exploitative conditions of motherhood through the hetero-patriarchal ideology of maternal love. This premise, however, does not make mothering work any less of a political resource in our liberation struggles.



Writing of black mothers who were forced to care for white children instead of their own, bell hooks has argued for the need to honour their fight to defend home as a space of affirmation where generations of black people could "restore to [themselves] the dignity denied [them] ... in the public world." While the conditions that shape mothering today differ radically across communities, the principle that homeplace can and should be a site of reclamation resonates powerfully for me. As Sto:Lo scholar Lee Maracle claims, "Without children I could not have learned that what is revival and renaissance for a Native is death for a colonizer."

There is a vast store of experience, knowledge and resilience among women who, as mothers and caregivers, have made it possible for their communities of struggle to continue. Under neoliberalism, poor women's individual responsibilities to earn formal and informal wages, as part-time, contingent, flexible labour, while caregiving for family and community members cut off from state support are constantly multiplying. The tendency to fixate on their victimization or idealize them as "superwomen" stalls recognition of their capacities as *oppositional* leaders, organizers, intellectuals and

strategists. Further, the absence of intellectual and creative energy dedicated to articulating programs of resistance centered on feminized work tends to promote individualized strategies of "empowerment." It also lets single, able-bodied folks without caregiving responsibilities off the hook by failing to redistribute unpaid feminized work. To the extent that progressive struggles are limited to increasing or defending welfare rates, wages, state-provided child care and other provisions to ameliorate dispossession and alienation under capitalism, they also perpetuate the feminization and privatization of mothering/caregiving labour, while surrendering actual mothers/caregivers to state and corporate exploitation, judgment and surveillance.

As capitalism races toward its zenith, we enter a historical moment of crisis and possibility that more than ever requires generative and multi-generational ways of conducting revolutionary struggle. We cannot afford to continue seeing homeplace simply as a source of sustenance; rather, it is a fundamental front in the production of life and political subjects that is constitutive of both capitalism and its limits. This is something the organized right implicitly

recognizes, which is why definitions of family, home and education have consistently formed the centrepieces of their ideology. Meanwhile, the left is still talking about how to create access for mothers and children in revolutionary work!

Once we recognize that raising a revolutionary generation is inherently political labour, collectivizing mothering work begins to make sense. It is work without applause which requires a profound decolonization of our ideas about personal freedom, which tend to mean the elimination of constraint and hierarchy rather than an active descent into relationships marked by necessity, dependence and negotiation of power imbalances, like those between adults and children. Mothering work commits us to the daily, mundane, repetitive, minute, inglorious labours of stitching together whole human beings. This is a skill and a long view adaptable to all aspects of revolutionary struggle. Perhaps encumbering ourselves with each other, and seeing beauty in that process, might be precisely the end that we need to accomplish. Perhaps this is what it takes to become subjects of something on the other side of capitalist oppression, something hopefully more imbued with love. ⑥

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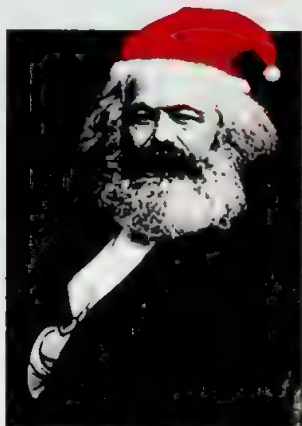
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# FROM THE JAWS OF DEFEAT

## *Four thoughts on social change strategy*

By Yutaka Dirks

Illustration by Toren Atkinson

**I**n the months since the election that secured Stephen Harper's Conservative majority, many people on the left have repeated the refrain, "Don't mourn; organize." While it is an apt and important directive, what does it really mean? How will we organize? In the absence of clear strategies for social change, we risk working ourselves into the ground without making the gains we need.

The right in Canada has clearly understood the importance of developing a strategy with winnable goals, and in the last 10 years it has succeeded in shifting public discourse far to the right of where it had been for decades. Stephen Harper went from an outspoken conservative activist who had served only one previous term as an MP to consolidating the Canadian right into a single political party and controlling, unfettered, the federal government.

By contrast, the radical left has largely been in decline over the past 10 years, both in visibility and influence. Indeed, many radicals feel we do not have a fighting chance, and carry on with a bizarre mantra akin to "everything is hopeless, but we have to do something." Often we talk about a radically transformed society in much the same way as Christians talk about heaven or the Rapture – something to look forward to far, far in the future, but not something that can be attained, even in part, in a span of months or years.

To reverse this downward spiral, we must develop winning strategies of our own. If we hope to achieve a more just society in the future, we need to alter the way we work in the present. We must develop strategic action plans that increase the organized power of our movement and result in concrete and measurable improvements in people's lives.

I would like to offer four thoughts as my contribution to this ongoing discussion within radical community and worker organizations in Canada.

### **1. A lost cause?**

On November 16, 2010, a small community-based organization representing migrant farm workers signed a historic agreement with their employers to improve conditions for workers in Florida's tomato industry. This marked the conclusion of the most recent chapter in a story that began in 1993, when the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) was formed to demand improved working conditions for migrant farm workers and an end to poverty wages. The 2010 agreement between the CIW and the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange, the organization representing land-owners, extended the CIW's "fair food principles" to over 90 per cent of the Florida tomato industry. These principles include a strict code of conduct, a co-operative complaint resolution system, a participatory health and safety program and a worker-to-worker education process. The agreement also solidified a victory previously won by the CIW from tomato purchasers to increase farm worker wages by almost 100 per cent.

It is hard to imagine a group of workers more marginalized than those who form the membership of the CIW – largely undocumented migrants from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean – or an adversary as relatively powerful as the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange, which brings in billions of dollars in profit every year. To many, the CIW's



cause, while just, seemed lost from the beginning. Indeed, from our current vantage point, it is easy to view a campaign such as this one as a lost cause.

Our causes are not lost. But in the absence of a coherent strategy, our activism is unlikely to produce any clear-cut victories. Whether we are planning a short-term campaign or the theoretical work of long-term, widespread and systemic social change, the process of strategy development is the same. To begin developing a winning strategy, we must first ask ourselves: what does victory look like?

In a context where victories on the left are rare, the campaign led by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers – which was won through commitment to a well-planned strategy – has much to teach us. The CIW had a clear vision of justice: increased wages and improved working conditions. Based on this foundation, they developed concrete goals that would help them realize their vision. Their fair food principles were clear and well-defined, and enabled workers to determine, without ambiguity, whether they had been successful in their campaign or not.

Our strategies – as a movement, as a coalition, or within our respective organizations or communities – must begin with a clear vision developed through democratic discussion. This vision can then be refined into tangible goals to work toward. For example, a vision of “housing as a right” may lead to goals such as a national housing strategy, with guaranteed annual funding for rental housing and new housing co-ops owned and controlled by their members, and legislation that would give homeless people the right to seek a court order forcing the government to provide them with housing.

As we develop these goals, we need to be both creative and disciplined, allowing ourselves to dream big, while at the same time stopping ourselves from degenerating into arguments over the details of our vision of a post-revolutionary society. After setting our goals, we can begin to build a strategy that will lead us to victory, a strategy that must be constantly evaluated as it unfolds and adjusted as necessary.

## **2. Power, to the people**

On June 25, 2011, Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party legislated an end to the Canadian Union of Postal Workers’ strike. The newly invigorated NDP, recently elected as the official Opposition, attempted a filibuster, prolonging debate over 58 hours. In the end, however, the legislation passed and the strike was ended. A number of prominent radicals later used the NDP’s failure to stop the legislation as proof that there is no power in voting. In fact, the Canada Post situation suggests otherwise. Harper was able to force workers back on the job, on terms favourable to the employer, because his party secured enough seats to constitute a majority. He has tremendous power to shape the conditions of our

lives, power he gained through the electoral process, however illegitimate we believe it to be.

Power is the ability to shape our lives and the world that surrounds us. We build our power by organizing collectively. Unions, for example, have great potential power, as they have a defined membership, organizational structure and mandate. Whatever form our organizing takes, our strategy for social change must have at its core a plan to build the organized power of oppressed people.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers understood power well and developed their strategy accordingly. After identifying their goal, the CIW identified the target of their campaign: the growers. Targets are the people who have the institutional power to concede to your demands. They are those who can sign the cheque, cancel the contract, introduce or repeal the legislation and so on. If, during your strategy development, you arrive at a long list of targets, your goal is likely not adequately refined. In our hierarchical society, the kind of power needed to make institutional change is almost always vested in a single person or a small number of people.

In the small town of Immokalee, Florida, the majority of workers toil on fields owned by a small number of companies. Because the CIW wanted to improve wages and conditions for all of their members – who often worked on several farms in a given season – they organized a campaign targeting all growers. They engaged in three community-wide work stoppages and a high-profile hunger strike but, after years of working to get the growers to concede to their demands, realized they did not have the power necessary to force their targets to capitulate.

The CIW then identified a secondary target that had power over the growers – the corporations that purchased their produce. In 2001 the CIW launched a boycott of Taco Bell. They called on their allies to stop buying food at Taco Bell restaurants until the fast-food giant took responsibility for human rights violations in their supply chain. They also demanded that Taco Bell support their campaign to “pass on a penny per pound” pay increase for farm workers and to buy tomatoes only from compliant Florida growers.

In 2005, after a hard-fought and high-profile campaign, Taco Bell agreed to meet all of the workers’ demands, and the CIW called off the boycott. Taco Bell could not present the agreement as a goodwill gesture as it was clearly a concession to the power of the workers who had struggled for it. The CIW then moved to target McDonald’s, another of the growers’ biggest customers.

The right takes the project of building institutional power very seriously. As Tom Flanagan, Conservative academic and Harper confidante, has said, “... controlling the government as often as possible is the most effective way of shifting the public philosophy.” The radical left has shown that mass movements, outside of government, can also be powerful

**To begin  
developing a  
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ask ourselves:  
what does victory  
look like?**



enough to shift public philosophy and to radically improve people's lives. Our movements must become a growing source of organized power that can be consciously wielded and directed against our targets in the service of attaining our goals, and affecting a lasting shift in the balance of power.

### 3. Seeing through clear and open eyes

While the G8 and G20 countries met in southern Ontario in June of 2010, thousands of people marched and rallied in a week of protest. These actions were met with massive police repression, and by the end of the week hundreds of people had been assaulted and harassed, and over 1,000 people had been arrested. The targeting of activists and militants continued for weeks, and several hundred faced charges by summer's end.

A month after the G20 protests, the coordinating body for much of the radical left during the protests released a statement insisting that in "June 2010, on the streets of Toronto, the people won."

This assessment was based primarily on the fact that participants of diverse struggles and community organizations were leading many of the street protests, and did so despite overwhelming police intimidation. If our only goal was to voice our discontent, in all its diversity, then the mobilization against the G20 was a victory. However, if the goal was to change the destructive policies of the G20, to alter the balance of power between the economic-political elite and the rest of us, and to inspire those not already committed to join us, our success was neither clear nor resounding.

Our success in these struggles will depend on our ability to see the world through

clear and open eyes, and to make reasoned assessments of our strategies, actions and their outcomes. This process demands that we identify the people and groups that constitute our base, our allies and our opponents.

Our base (or constituency) includes those oppressed people and communities that are already active or organized. Many members of unions and community organizations are within our base, and can move their organizations to become part of our base or movement. Our potential base includes all people oppressed by capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism and ableism, but who are not actively resisting that oppression.

Our allies are those who share some, but not necessarily all, of our goals, with whom we can work on a common cause. Many unions are our allies. Their primary goal is not the end of capitalist oppression, but rather the improvement of their members' working conditions and wages, and some positive social reforms. Single-issue social justice organizations are another.

Our opponents are organizations and groups that benefit from the oppression we are fighting against. They may control the levers of power directly, or have influence over our targets without having that power themselves. Landlord and industry lobby groups, the Conservative Party, the Fraser Institute, organized racist movements and Zionist lobby groups are some examples of opponents.

The state is our primary target, because it can give us much of what we want. The state, however, is a complex institution. Its overarching purpose is to protect the interests of capital and maintain the status quo, but it is also composed of individuals and institutions with shifting or competing allegiances. If we view the state only as a monolithic oppressive entity with a single, uni-



*We don't have to convince every single person to be a radical. We do, however, need to tip the balance of power and isolate our opponents and targets from their bases of support.*

GRAPHIC: OLIVIA VILKINS



fied purpose, we miss opportunities to exploit those differences to win concessions.

In their struggle for fair food, the benefits of the CIW's lucid self-assessment were clear. When they determined that their well-organized base lacked the power necessary to force their target to concede, they identified a network of powerful allies. They reached out to students because Taco Bell targeted them as consumers. They also allied themselves with religious groups that they hoped would be motivated by a sense of justice and moral outrage, and which were already organized into congregations and church networks.

To develop a strategy capable of radical social transformation, we must also assess the power of our movement relative to that of our opponents and targets. We should have a clear sense of the numbers of each group and their geographical distribution, the donations and resources at their disposal and so on. The number of active and engaged people in radical movements in Canada number only a few thousand at most, and much of this activity is focused in a handful of urban centres and Indigenous communities across the country. Certainly there are more people who are sympathetic to some of our goals, or who would benefit from the changes we seek, but they are only potential constituents until they become active in some way.

By contrast, the Conservative Party has organizers in each federal riding who fund-raise, coordinate get-out-the-vote work during elections, monitor local media and engage in other campaign work. To support their work, the Conservatives received donations from 95,010 people, totalling over \$17.4 million in 2010. This may seem like an impossible sum for radicals in this country, but it amounts to a relatively small donation of \$183 per person, or a monthly donation of only \$15. If the left could do more to secure commitments like this from our base, whether they are in the form of time or money to build our infrastructure or pay organizers, we could dramatically increase our power.

By explicitly identifying our base, our potential constituents, our opponents, and those somewhere in the middle, and by assessing each group's strengths and weaknesses, we can make informed choices about our direction as a movement and the tactics we choose to target our opponents where they are weakest.

#### **4. Throwing punches**

The CIW came to their recent victory after a long struggle. They employed a variety of powerful tactics targeting their employers during the first seven years, including three work stoppages, a month-long hunger strike and a 370-kilometre march across Florida. When they changed the focus of their

strategy to target fast-food chains and corporate buyers of Florida tomatoes in order to pressure the growers into conceding, they employed many of the same tactics.

Students and other social justice groups held demonstrations in cities across the United States, and helped the CIW mobilize cross-country caravans and several national days of action. Some student groups were successful in forcing franchises off their campuses. Religious leaders motivated their congregations to join the campaign, collected donations for the CIW, and held press conferences to exert pressure through moral persuasion or embarrassment, to isolate the fast-food giants from support, and to polarize the debate around the issue. By the end of 2008, the CIW had won campaigns against the four largest fast-food companies in the world.

**How we fight should be determined by how it helps us win. Throwing one's fists into the air in all directions – hoping that you land a knockout punch – is not how one wins a boxing match.**

Our strategies must employ a variety, or diversity, of tactics to achieve our goals. These tactics must be directed at our targets to pressure those with the power to give us what we want – whether that is a change in immigration law, more affordable housing, or a complete shift in government policy. It is not the perceived militancy of our tactics that matters, but whether they effectively pressure our target to concede to our demands and, while doing so, help build our base. The pressure must not be rhetorical, but actually felt by the target.

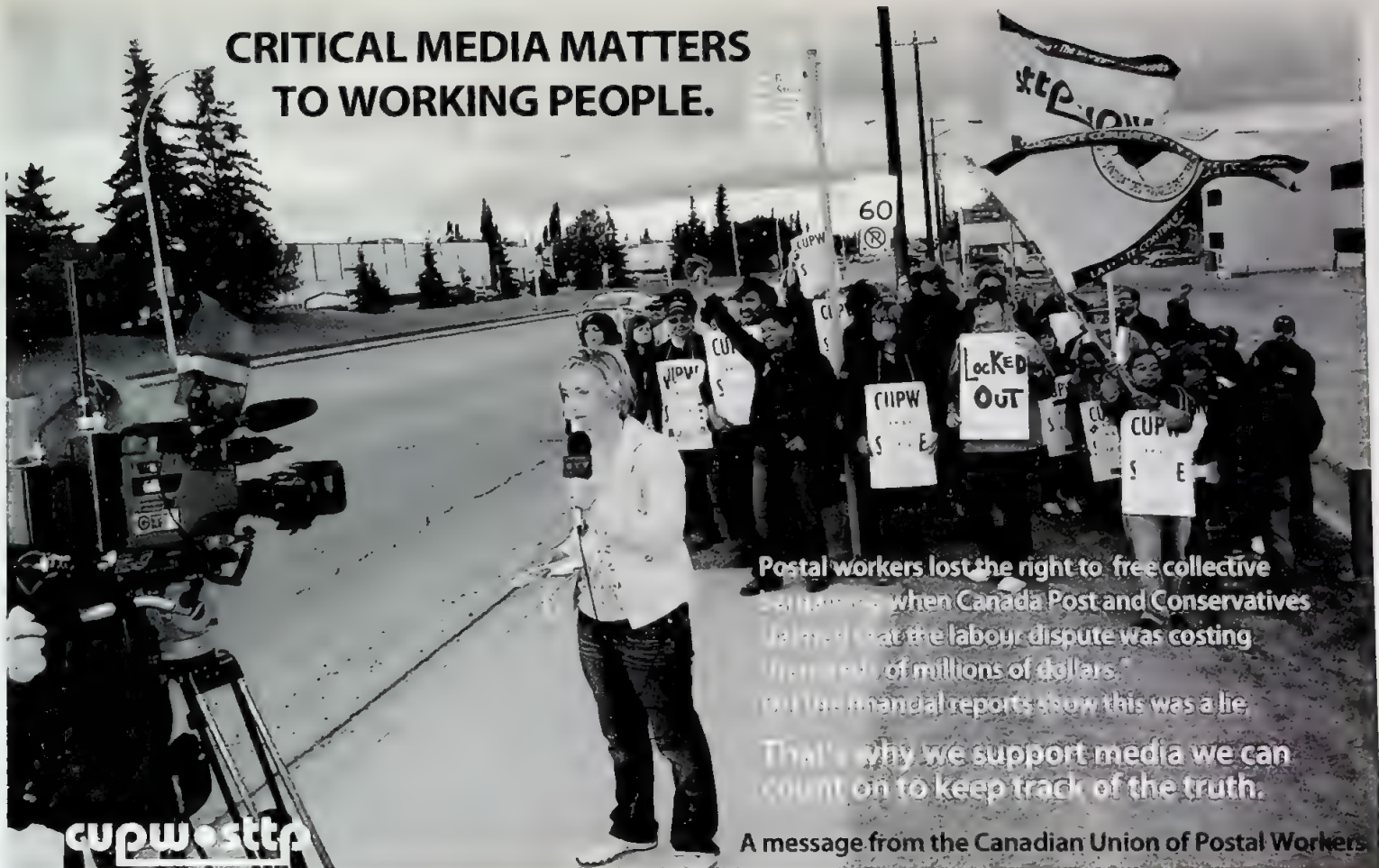
The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty – a radical anti-poverty organization based in Toronto – organizes under the slogan “Fight to win.” They understand that those in power do not listen to moral argument, but that the poor will have to build a movement capable of forcing politicians to act.

We should take this lesson to heart, but when we repeat this slogan, we should not make the mistake – as many have done and continue to do – of putting the emphasis on “fight” rather than on “to win.” How we fight should be determined by how it helps us win. Throwing one's fists into the air in all directions – hoping that you land a knockout punch – is not how one wins a boxing match. Not every target is vulnerable in the same way. A disruptive direct action may be effective against one but not another, and what works once may not work a second time. Many of our targets are immune to protests and demonstrations, but this does not mean they cannot be successfully pressured.

Our actions must be well-planned manifestations of our power, directed with clear purpose against our targets. We must be able to win short-term victories as steps in our strategy and to strengthen our movements so that, eventually, we will have permanently altered the balance of power and become a force to be reckoned with – a cause not lost, but rather an organized movement capable of snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. ⑥



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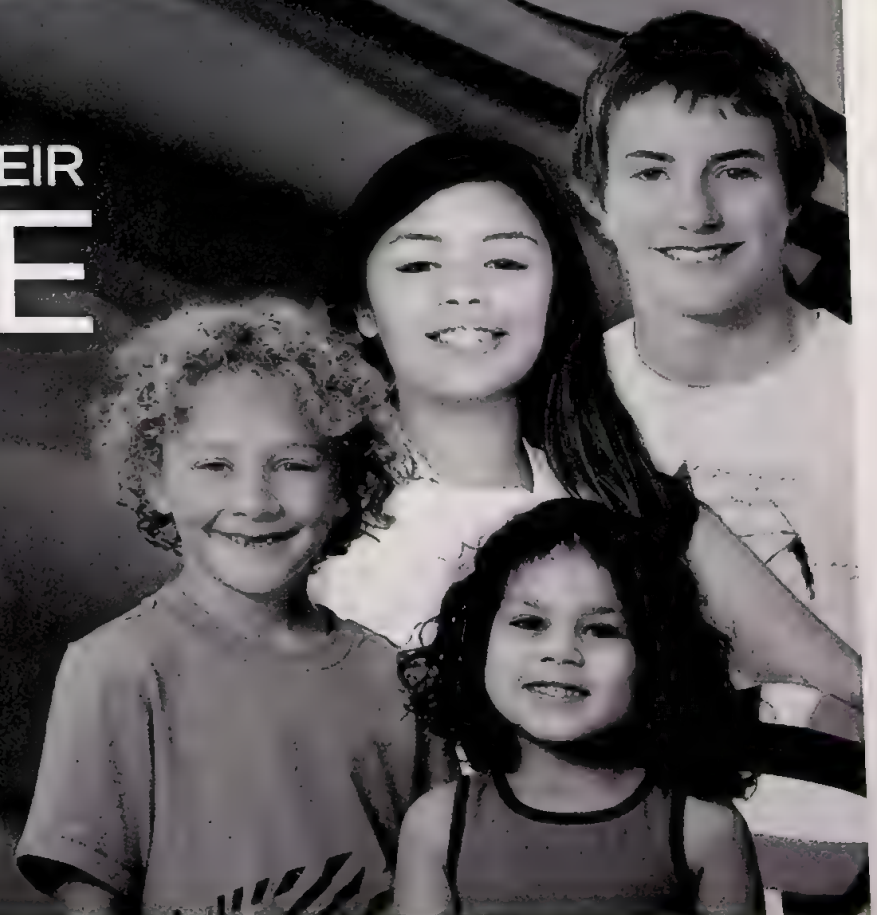
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# PRISON LABOUR IN CANADA

**WHILE** the crime rate is at its lowest since 1973, rates of incarceration are climbing steadily in Canada as a result of the Conservative government's tough-on-crime agenda. Prison spending has jumped 86 per cent since Harper was first elected in 2006, and work has already begun expanding prisons to accommodate an expected influx of 4,000 additional inmates over the next five years.

In addition to longer sentencing for a slew of crimes and mandatory minimum sentences, Harper's most recent omnibus crime bill, the Safe Streets and Communities Act, will create additional roadblocks for inmates seeking parole, keeping more people in prison for longer periods of time.

For CORCAN, the division of Correctional Service Canada (CSC) which currently operates prison work programs in over 50 shops in manufacturing, textile production, industrial laundry, and other industries, and its corporate partners, a burgeoning prison population means an expanding workforce. As prisoners fall outside of the Canada Labour Code regulations for wages and benefits, this growing pool of labour is "an excellent return on investment," according to one corporate partner, and a growing industry in Canada.

Most of the inmates are required to attend 16 hours of work, training, education, life skills, and other programs five days per week. Some inmates work off their sentence time by doing community work or other projects, or by doing other projects on weekends.

The time pay for inmates is **\$1.05 TO \$1.38** per hour for production work. In addition, inmates are paid 1.5 times the regular wage for overtime work.

## 4074 INMATES

participating in CORCAN work programs

The largest buyers of CORCAN goods and services: Correctional Service Canada, Department of National Defence

Total worth of goods and services produced by prison labour each year:

**\$60.7 MILLION**

\$6.6 million in sales to not-for-profit organizations, other levels of government and the private sector

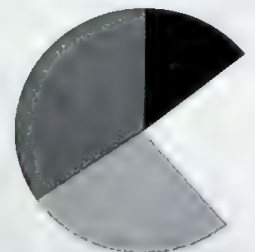
Total number of hours worked:

**2.6 MILLION**

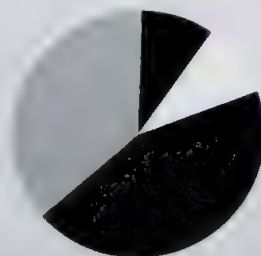
## WOMEN'S WORK

CORCAN employs 54 community employment counsellors to help people find work once on day parole or released from prison. Women are more likely to find work in low-wage, service sector jobs, even with the assistance of CORCAN.

## TOP FEMALE JOB PLACEMENTS

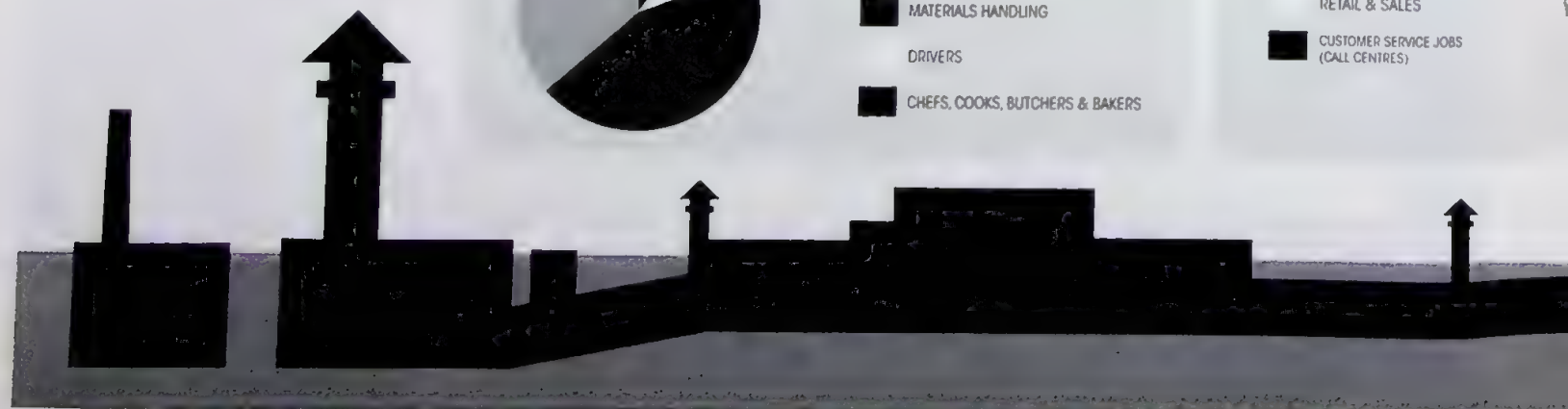


## TOP MALE JOB PLACEMENTS



- CONSTRUCTION
- GENERAL INSTALLERS/GENERAL LABOUR & REPAIR
- MATERIALS HANDLING
- DRIVERS
- CHEFS, COOKS, BUTCHERS & BAKERS

- FOOD & BEVERAGE SERVICES
- CLEANERS & JANITORS
- RETAIL & SALES
- CUSTOMER SERVICE JOBS (CALL CENTRES)





By Kaley Kennedy and Emily Davidson

## WAGES

**DAILY** allowance for incarcerated workers:

**\$5.25 TO \$6.90**



Last time the daily allowance changed

**1986**

Accounting for inflation, daily prison allowance has dropped 250% in the past 25 years.



## WHO IS INCARCERATED IN CANADA?



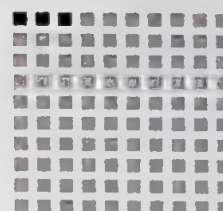
MALE

FEMALE

**22,749**

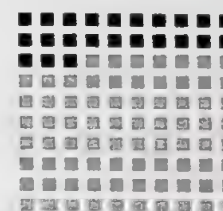
number of people currently incarcerated in Canada

Aboriginal people comprise 3% of the Canadian population



VS.

Aboriginal people comprise 22.7% of prison admissions in Canada



## WAGES

In 1981, the average cost of a two-week workday for an inmate was \$1.40. In 2006, the same supply cost \$1.40. Even when adjusted for inflation, inmates have almost halved their wages.



## BENEFITS

Maternity leave for inmates:

**15 WEEKS**

VS.

Maternity leave for the average Canadian worker:

**17 WEEKS**

IN SASKATCHEWAN, ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ACCOUNT FOR 60% OF INMATES. AT THE LABRADOR CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION, UPWARDS OF 90% OF INMATES ARE INUIT, INNU OR METIS.

## WE DON'T NEED NO EDUCATION?

While Correctional Service Canada provides Adult Basic Education for those inmates with less than a grade 12 education, inmates who want to pursue post-secondary education are responsible for paying for it themselves.

## EE EDUCATION

PROGRAMMING FOR OFFENDERS BUILDS CAPACITY FOR LASTING PERSONAL CHANGE, REDUCES THE RISK OF RE-OFFENDING AND INCREASES THE POTENTIAL FOR SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION.

Commissioner's Directive, 720.10

## REDUCTIONS

"Room and Board" expenses deducted from any income over \$69 in a two-week period: 25% of wages (to a maximum of \$25 per week)



Inmates and their employers, whether the prison or an outside company or organization, do not pay Employment Insurance or Canada Pension Plan premiums. None of their work hours are eligible for these programs.

Annual college tuition fees in Canada:

**\$1,800 - \$3,300**

vs.

Top inmate pay:

**\$1794 PER YEAR**

Inmate Welfare Fund, which pays for various inmate amenities:



**\$0.10 TO \$0.60 PER WORK DAY**



# NATIONWIDE: PROFIT BEFORE PEOPLE

**IN 2009,** CORCAN announced that it would phase out six of its prison farms. Critics, including prison inmate committees, Margaret Atwood, the National Farmers Union, the Public Service Alliance of Canada and OPIRG, called for a halt to the closures. Prisoners working on the farms earned a maximum of \$8 per day. Food was used by corrections and donations were made to local food banks. The government cited cost savings of \$4 million as the reason for the closures, indicating that work programs are only valuable when profitable.

**IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT JUDGES, UTILIZING SENTENCING GUIDELINES FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, ARE SENDING MORE OFFENDERS BACK INTO THE COMMUNITY INSTEAD OF TO WORK CAMPS OR OTHER CUSTODIAL INSTITUTIONS.**

Heather Forsyth  
Alberta MLA,  
former Solicitor General

## ALBERTA

In the mid-1990s, Alberta had one of the most robust prison labour programs in the country. The province operated half a dozen work camps for prisoners in farming, logging and other physically demanding labour. In 2004, the provincial government closed the majority of work camps in the province, though work crews remain prevalent in provincial jails. Work crews at Lethbridge Correctional Centre, for example, are hired regularly by the City of Lethbridge to help clear leaves and branches in parks. In other jurisdictions, this work is done by unionized city employees.



**IT'S NO COINCIDENCE THAT THE IDEA OF MANDATORY PRISON LABOUR IS BEING FLOATED BY HUDAK AT THE SAME TIME THAT THE HARPER GOVERNMENT IS BUILDING MORE PRISONS — THIS WILL BE A HUGE LABOUR FORCE TO EXPLOIT.**

Sara Falconer, prisoner justice activist

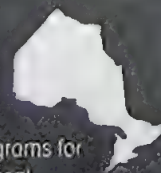
## BRITISH COLUMBIA

In January 2011, a group of 14 inmates at a medium-security prison in Agassiz, B.C., drafted a constitution for a labour union for inmates. In a press release the prisoners stated that the proposed union, ConFederation, Canadian Prisoners' Labour Union, Local 001, would address issues that "plague the prison population as a workforce," including workplace safety, access to vocational training and pay. Attempts to unionize were met with significant resistance from administrators, according to the inmates' lawyer, Natalie Dunbar. While prisoners reached the final stages of signing up members to ConFederation, the proposal was ultimately withdrawn according to the Correctional Service of Canada. Such an inmate labour union would be the first of its kind in Canada.



## ONTARIO

In the Spring of 2011, Ontario Progressive Conservative Leader Tim Hudak pledged that, if elected, he would institute mandatory work programs for people incarcerated in provincial jails. His proposal includes having prisoners work up to 40 hours per week in manual labour jobs earning "credits they can use for rewards such as television time, coffee, and gym time."





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# Crisis in Care

*Ontario is pioneering the privatization of long-term care in Canada – at the expense of residents and staff alike.*

By Justin Panos

Illustration by Shantala Robinson

A pill trolley rattles urgently as it makes its rounds in one of Ontario's many long-term care homes. The support worker pushing it looks visibly exhausted, while a nurse practitioner moves stressfully under the imperatives of time and patient needs, tending to the unwashed, unshaved, undressed, unturned and unfed.

Ontario's long-term care homes, which provide 24-hour nursing services to chronically ill residents who require some form of basic assistance for daily living, suffer intolerably from an understaffing crisis.

As the pioneer of privatized care in Canada, Ontario has opened the doors for a corporate takeover of long-term care homes, resulting in chronic understaffing by profit-seeking multinational providers.

Those in Ontario with the good fortune of longevity must brave the consequences of this increasingly corporate care. For residents, this means that staff are so busy as to be unreachable. Meanwhile the owners – the corporate directors and proprietors of the homes – continue to extract a profit, a vital portion of which is public money funnelled from government subsidies urgently needed for patient care.

In an effort to counter this deliberate understaffing, a coalition of forces – unions, residents and their families – have been principled in their calls for an enforceable average of 3.5 hours of care per resident. Ontario is the only province without such a law. The currently triumphant opposition is the corporations whose profits are based on the ability to keep staffing levels as close to zero as possible.

Despite the understaffing crisis, multinational providers such as Extendicare, whose workers reported 36 understaffed shifts in one month, have no scruples about advertising themselves to investors as an asset that “generates strong cash flow” – cash flow derived from public money that ought to be allocated for long-term care staff.

Long-term care is a burgeoning market across Canada. This is particularly true in Ontario, with over 75,000 long-term care residents. Of these residents, 75 per cent of whom are women, 73 per cent have a form of dementia, 72 per cent need assistance with mobility and 86 per cent have some degree of incontinence.

The need for reliable and safe levels of staff clashes irreconcilably with the imperative of a corporate provider to expand its quarterly earnings. Ontario's long-term care sector is now the most corporatized in the country, with six multinational corporations having secured 76 per cent of the market. Staffing levels in Ontario rank below all provinces save for B.C. The connection between privatization and understaffing is neither spurious nor shocking.

## **The making of Ontario's long-term care market**

During the recession of the early 1990s, the debt obligations of the Ontario government became intractably high. As part of sweeping cutbacks in public services, Bob Rae's NDP government began to delist the services provided by hospitals, which are covered under the Ontario Health Insurance Plan.

The ground watered by Rae quickly bore fruit for multinational real estate investment trusts, looped and linked as they were with Ontario Conservatives in the 1996 election. In exchange for lavish contributions to their campaign, the Tories began the process of contracting out services as recommended by the Health Services Restructuring Commission. The three corporations that gave donations in excess of \$22,000 – Extendicare, Central Park Lodges and Leisureworld – received roughly 40 per cent of the contracts by 2001. Thus began the conversion of Ontario's long-term care homes into coveted commodities and the diminishment of staff to boost the profitability of these assets.



Despite the understaffing crisis, multinational providers such as Extendicare, whose workers reported 36 understaffed shifts in one month, have no scruples about advertising themselves to investors as an asset that “generates strong cash flow” – cash flow derived from the public money that ought to be allocated for long-term care staff.

In 1994 there were 74.4 registered nurses per 10,000 people; by 1999 there were 67.6. The corporations that made seemingly low bids for contracts did so only under the stipulation that they could cut their staffing levels to recoup profits. Then-premier Mike Harris erased the legislation that required a minimum of 2.25 hours of care per resident, ensuring that profits would rebound sufficiently.

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, appearing more benign than the Tories, was elected on the grounds that he would reverse the Tories’ assault on the public sector. Yet the Liberals have actually managed to contribute less to Ontario health care than their Tory predecessors. Between 2003 and 2007 health-care spending increased by 30 per cent, whereas between 1998 and 2003 the same indicator increased by 43 per cent.

In 2007 Premier McGuinty finally appeared to be honouring his health-care promises and tabled Bill 140, which became the Long-Term Care Homes Act in 2010. After three years of ostensibly fruitful consultations with a vast number of unions and advocacy groups like the Ontario Health Coalition, the McGuinty government had everyone convinced that a minimum of 3.5 hours of care would find life in black letter legal code.

Yet the chief consultant for the provincial government, Shirley Sharkey, abruptly abandoned the minimum standard and advanced toothless and non-binding guidelines, which the corporate community has blithely ignored. Sharkey and Premier McGuinty disregarded the near-universal calls for minimum standards of care, as the resolution to the understaffing crisis was entirely contingent on an amendment to Bill 140 that would give the public the power to set staffing standards.

### **The real crisis in provincial health care finances**

**T**he understaffing crisis in Ontario’s long-term care homes is bred in the bone of privatization. Based on the assessed needs of a home’s residents, the government provides a per diem subsidy, which currently stands at \$152.94 per resident per day for services.

Government funding goes into four envelopes in each private or public home: staffing, food, services and accommo-

dations. The accommodations envelope is the only envelope from which a corporate home is not obliged to return to the government any unused funds. In other words, every unused dollar in this envelope is rendered into profits. Managers, then, seek to move costs, like incontinence supplies, into other envelopes to free up potential money for profit.

Such managerial manoeuvres require approval by regulatory bodies, such as Ontario’s unelected Local Health Integration Networks, which are composed of Liberal and corporate patronage appointees. The cozy relationship between corporations and public officials makes this a much simpler affair than it ought to be. Without a legislated standard, this sort of double-dealing with envelopes is as unpreventable as it is dangerous.

The consequences of corporate care in Ontario are felt by both residents and workers. Residents who suffer from cognitive impairments, making language and social connections and abstract thought difficult, register their frustration against the first hurried staff member who eventually gets around to tend to their needs. One Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) study, “Out of Control: Violence Against Personal Support Workers in Long-Term Care,” found that nearly half of all staff can expect to be assaulted at least once a day.

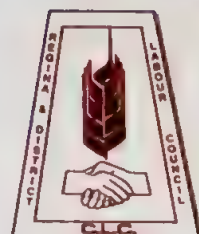
Ontario is the pioneer of this style of “care,” where exploitation of staff and neglect of residents thicken the dividends for corporate owners. Other provincial governments are, frighteningly, beginning to follow suit.

But as nurse-to-patient ratios grow unsustainably high, front-line caregivers, along with the Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario, CUPE, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union and the Ontario Health Coalition, have entered into a struggle to stop corporate providers from misappropriating public money for private profit. Central to their campaign is the call for a minimum standard of 3.5 hours of daily care per resident, without which corporate providers face no imperative to provide adequate staffing.

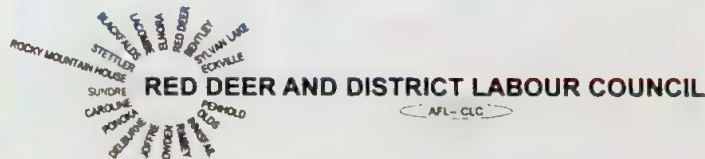
This battle goes beyond the elderly. Since even the sprightliest of us will invariably face the trials of aging, we ought all to be concerned with restoring accountable, publicly provided long-term care across Canada. **•**



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# Armed with knowledge

*Saskatchewan's Labour Issues campaign aims to forge a new way for the labour movement to engage in politics – and it's getting people talking.*

By Tracey Mitchell

Illustration by Nicklas Johnson



The labour movement has been on the defensive across the country in recent months with a lockout and back-to-work legislation at Canada Post, a protracted dispute between Air Canada and the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and continued attacks on collective bargaining rights by the federal government. In Saskatchewan, legislation passed by the Wall government has limited workers' rights to organize and form unions, to bargain collectively and to strike.

The position of labour has, in many respects, never been weaker. At a time of extreme political polarization in the country, particularly in Saskatchewan where a recent economic boom for some has left others homeless and otherwise struggling to make ends meet, right-wing governments and conservative media are succeeding in playing the average worker against the union worker, who is typically portrayed as

cash grabbing and lazy. Increasingly, the public, including many low-income and middle-class people, is voting for parties that promise smaller government and tax savings, supposedly leaving more money in their pockets for the things they need most.

This narrative has inspired surprisingly little dissent, and has proven successful in persuading voters. Many have lost sight of the fact that lower taxes mean fewer public services, lower wages and benefits for public-sector workers (which in turn lowers the bar for the private sector), and little regulation of environmental protections or health and safety. In the face of this kind of apathy and misinformation, a campaign that inspires people to re-engage politically through a combination of information, action and close-to-home narratives has the potential to help shake things up.

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) Labour Issues campaign

is a broad and comprehensive project based on popular education and community mobilization around issues facing the people of Saskatchewan, including workers' rights, health care, education, public services, environment and other issues. While the campaign is intended, in part, to frame the debate in the upcoming Saskatchewan provincial election, its purpose is also to empower people to become political agents beyond election time. Whereas the traditional role of the labour movement in provincial election campaigns has focused on supporting the New Democratic Party (NDP), the Labour Issues campaign aims to forge a new way for labour to engage in politics and influence public opinion beyond political endorsement.

The first incarnation of the Labour Issues campaign began in the lead up to the 2003 provincial election. Organizers polled union households to identify the



issues of most concern to workers, and ran ad campaigns to stimulate discussion of those issues. Many credit the impact of the campaign for the NDP's surprise victory in an election where no one expected them to retain power. The campaign was particularly effective at changing the terms of the debate on Crown corporations and putting the right-wing Saskatchewan Party on the defensive, forcing them to deny that they would sell off provincially

organizing so we are not just talking to unionized people."

Rhonda Derby is one of the union activists who has participated in the Labour Issues training. She worries that the campaign may not reach enough people since she often sees the same dedicated few at training sessions. That's why Derby has stacks of booklets in her car that she drops off at doctors' offices, bulletin boards and elsewhere in the community. "There are a few people

booklets and done hundreds of presentations in all parts of the province. The unique training sessions, grounded in popular education techniques that draw on participants' stories and experiences before presenting new information, give the mobilizers effective tools to engage people in their presentations. Community activist Emily Eaton says, "I thought that the training sessions were really interesting in that they tried to focus not just on the issues themselves, but on how to talk to people, what might grab their attention, what the potential pitfalls are, and where are you going to encounter resistance."

There are differing opinions within the Saskatchewan labour movement about whether it is more effective for unions to work independently in politics or to be directly affiliated with political parties. These tensions may grow in the coming months as Brad Wall's Saskatchewan Party is poised for re-election on November 7, likely with an even stronger majority. While in the past many unions would have tried to oust such an unfriendly government by encouraging their members to support the NDP, the Labour Issues campaign instead educates and engages people about the political process, with the aim of fostering personal agency and community power.

The Labour Issues campaign will not end with the provincial election. If the Saskatchewan Party is in fact given a stronger mandate, the organizers in the campaign will have their work cut out for them. Advocates for the Labour Issues campaign approach argue that the most significant part of the campaign is not in the details of the issues or even in the electoral result, but in engaging and mobilizing people across the province at a grassroots level. "I don't see the issues themselves as being as important as the analysis of how power operates, and how we can effectively challenge it," Eaton noted. "The Labour Issues campaign is broadening the base of people who can speak confidently about these issues, organize their communities, and ultimately make demands on government – regardless of which party happens to be in power." 6

## **Whereas the traditional role of the labour movement in provincial election campaigns has focused on encouraging people to vote for the NDP, the Labour Issues campaign instead educates and engages people about the political process, with the aim of fostering personal agency and community power.**

owned utilities if elected. A similar approach was adopted by the SFL for the 2007 election. That year, however, Brad Wall's Saskatchewan Party was elected, which soon had disastrous consequences for workers.

In 2010 the SFL opted to expand the campaign beyond election time, with ongoing popular education and political engagement with workers and community members across the province. It began in early 2010 with the publication of a booklet titled *Labour Rights are Human Rights*, which includes information about the regressive Bills 5 and 6 and other provincial government attacks on workers. Mobilizers within the labour movement and the broader progressive community were asked to organize presentations in their communities, workplaces and union locals about the issue. Booklets about health care, education, public services and more issues were soon developed, and mobilizers were again trained on these topics.

Speaking about the most recent incarnation of the campaign, Cara Banks, executive assistant at the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, said, "After 22 months of talking with workers, this campaign has had a significant impact. We've also invited community activists to the trainings, and have expanded our

who don't think that they are affected by the cuts, but once it is explained how it relates to them, it's like a light bulb moment and just about everyone is a little pissed off," Derby noted. She has also been successful getting co-workers involved in election campaigns after receiving the information. "Some worked phones or did flyer drops, and a couple of people went knocking on doors. Most importantly, they engaged others in conversations about the political climate we are in."

Although those behind the Labour Issues campaign would ideally like to develop a broader vision and outline the kind of Saskatchewan they would like to see, they have found that a more defensive approach is necessary given the scale of the attack the Wall government is waging on workers. Larry Kowalchuk, one of the campaign organizers and trainers, says, "Just letting people know what this government is doing is an immense task. The accountability is just not there in the media and in the general public. This government is tearing the heart out of Saskatchewan."

Mobilizers in the Labour Issues campaign and the SFL political strategy committee, the body behind the campaign, have worked very hard. They have produced and distributed over 200,000



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Don Drummond, TD Chief Economist  
October 2, 2009, Toronto Speech

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for the next  
75 years..."***

Jean-Claude Menard, Chief Actuary, CPI  
July 15, 2009, News Release



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*A call for international solidarity with Palestine*



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*On April 30, 2011, Palestinian labour activists gathered at a historic conference in Ramallah on the global campaign for Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel. This conference marked the founding of the Palestinian Trade Union Coalition for BDS (PTUC-BDS), the largest coalition of the Palestinian trade union movement, which aims to support and promote the BDS Call launched by Palestinian civil society in 2005. The following text is excerpted from the coalition's Statement of Principles and Call for International Trade Union Support for BDS.*



“

The global trade union movement has always played a key and inspiring role in its courageous commitment to human rights and adoption of concrete, ground-breaking, labor-led sanctions against oppressive regimes in a show of solidarity with oppressed peoples around the world. The trade union boycott of apartheid South Africa stands out as a bright example of this tradition of effective solidarity. Trade unions today are taking the lead in defending the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, justice, freedom, equality and the right of return of our refugees as stipulated in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194. Many of them have heeded the call from Palestinian civil society, and its labor movement in particular, to adopt Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) as the most effective form of solidarity with the Palestinians in our struggle to end Israeli occupation and apartheid.

Ending Israel's multi-tiered system of oppression against the Palestinian people – comprising occupation, colonialism and apartheid – has become a test for humanity. For decades, Israel has enjoyed impunity while continuing its gradual ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, particularly in occupied East Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley and the Naqab (Negev) desert; its 44-year-old occupation; its theft of land and natural resources; its colonization and construction of illegal colonial settlements and walls, its siege of Gaza; its relentless denial of refugee rights; its endless wars of aggression and incarceration of political prisoners; and its wanton killings of civilians and demolition of infrastructure. Israel's systematic destruction of the Palestinian economy, expropriation of the most fertile agricultural land, as well as humiliation of and racist discrimination against Palestinian workers have all become part of its apartheid reality that should never be tolerated by the world today.

Given the complete failure and unwillingness of hegemonic powers to hold Israel accountable to international law, it is up to people of conscience and international civil society, especially the trade union movement, to take concrete action to end international collusion with decades of violations of international law and human rights by Israel, its institutions and international corporations.[...]

Recalling the trade union maxim “an injury to one is an injury to all,” and given the global trade union movement's historic role in effective international solidarity with oppressed peoples around the world, PTUC-BDS:

- Cordially salutes all global trade unions for their solidarity with the Palestinian people, especially those that have endorsed BDS against Israel,
- Calls on trade unions around the world to actively show solidarity with the Palestinian people by implementing creative and context-sensitive BDS campaigns as the most effective way to end Israeli impunity. For example, by: boycotting Israeli and international companies (such as Elbit, Agrexco, Veolia, Alstom, Caterpillar, Northrop Grumman, etc.) and institutions that are complicit with Israel's occupation and violations of international law; reviewing pension fund investments with the purpose of divesting from Israel Bonds and all Israeli and international companies and institutions complicit in Israel's occupation, colonization and apartheid; pressuring governments to suspend Free Trade Agreements, end arms trade and military relations with Israel with the intention of eventually cutting all diplomatic ties with it.
- Calls on port workers around the world to boycott loading/offloading Israeli ships, similar to the heroic step taken by port workers around the world in suspending maritime trade with South Africa in protest against the apartheid regime, and
- Calls on trade unions around the world to review and sever all ties with the Histadrut.\*



Such non-violent measures of accountability must continue until Israel fulfils its obligations under international law in acknowledging the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination, and fully complies with international law by:

- Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands occupied since 1967 (including East Jerusalem), as well as dismantling of the illegal wall and colonies,
- Recognizing the fundamental right of the Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equity, as well as ending the system of racial discrimination against them, and
- Respecting, protecting and supporting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UNGA Resolution 194.

*The Palestinian Trade Union Coalition for BDS (PTUC-BDS) is the broadest and most representative body of the Palestinian trade union movement and includes the following organisations: General Union of Palestinian Workers, Federation of Independent Trade Unions (IFU), General Union of Palestinian Women, Union of Palestinian Professional Associations (comprising the professional syndicates of Engineers, Physicians, Pharmacists, Agricultural Engineers, Lawyers, Dentists and Veterinarians), General Union of Palestinian Teachers, General Union of Palestinian Peasants and Co-ops, General Union of Palestinian Writers, Union of Palestinian Farmers, Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUUE), Union of Public Employees in Palestine-Civil Sector; and all of the trade union blocks that make up the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU): Central Office for the Workers Movement, Progressive Labor Union Front, Workers Unity Block, Progressive Workers Block, Workers Solidarity Organization, Workers Struggle Block, Workers Resistance Block, Workers Liberation Front, Union of Palestinian Workers Struggle Committees, National Initiative (al-Mubadara) Block."*

## Take Action!

For more information on BDS, check out Omar Barghouti's book *Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights* or visit [BDSmovement.net](http://BDSmovement.net)

To find out more about how to support BDS in your union or organization, please contact [satopalestine@yahoo.com](mailto:satopalestine@yahoo.com)

For more ideas on how to get involved, visit [badil.org](http://badil.org) and click "Ways to Support Our Work."

*\*The Histadrut, considered Israel's central labour body, has always played a key role in perpetuating Israel's occupation, colonization and system of racial discrimination against Palestinians. It was first established as a tripartite, pre-state organization in 1920 that included its own army.*

## BDS and the Labour Movement in Canada

By Katherine Nastovski

Since the 2005 call for solidarity from Palestinian trade unions and civil society organizations, unions all over the world have responded with resolutions and actions to break ties with Israel's apartheid regime.

In Canada, support for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel has come from labour organizations ranging from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers to the Prince Edward Island Federation of Labour. Our unions join many other labour organizations internationally, including the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the United Workers Federation in Brazil, the Scottish Congress of Trade Unions, the Belgian Trade Union Federation, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the British Trade Union Congress.

As trade unionists in Canada, we still have a long way to go to break our links with the State of Israel's atrocities against the Palestinian people.

Many Canadian unions hold Israel Bonds, which are direct investments in the Israeli state held either by unions themselves or through members' pension funds. Additionally, many of our pension funds include investments in military and technology companies that sell equipment to the Israeli state, enabling everything from bombing raids in the Gaza Strip to the ongoing operation of over 100 military checkpoints in the West Bank, which Palestinians face as a daily obstacle on their way to work or school.

Great strides have been made over the past 10 to 15 years by activists within their unions to challenge a long history of uncritical support for Israel's colonization of Palestine. This has included grassroots education among union members, as well as "worker to worker" delegations in which workers have travelled to Palestine to meet with trade unionists there, and in turn hosted Palestinian trade unionists here in Canada.

Palestinians have given a clear message and direction to trade unionists globally: to stand in solidarity is to break all ties with, and support for, Israel's apartheid regime. We are not neutral actors. Solidarity means being active against oppression: divesting our support for the Israeli state and its racist military apparatus, boycotting companies that profit from apartheid, and mobilizing toward sanctions against the Israeli state.

### Labour organizations in Canada that have endorsed the 2005 Call for BDS:

Canadian Union of Postal Workers; Canadian Union of Public Employees (Ontario); Canadian Union of Public Employees Toronto District Council; Centrale des Syndicats du Québec; Conseil Central Montréal Métropolitain – Centrale des Syndicats Nationaux; Fédération Nationale des Enseignantes et des Enseignants du Québec; New Brunswick Federation of Labour; Prince Edward Island Federation of Labour; Vancouver and District Labour Council.



# The Teacher's Trap

*The equation of teaching with child care persists as a way of devaluing the work of teachers. While teaching duties undoubtedly exceed those of child care, how can teachers defend themselves without participating in the downgrading of "caring professions" – presumed to be the domain of women – more broadly?*

By Aleksandra McHugh

*"God seems to have made woman peculiarly suited to guide and develop the infant mind, and it seems ... very poor policy to pay a man 20 or 22 dollars a month, for teaching children the ABCs, when a female could do the work more successfully at one third of the price."*

— LITTLETON SCHOOL COMMITTEE, LITTLETON, MASSACHUSETTS, 1849

In the recent dust-up culminating in pre-summer job action by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF), news forums lit up as supporters and detractors exchanged barbs over the merits of the provincial government's and STF's respective bargaining positions.

While teachers clearly enjoy a base of support and even heroic status as frequent subjects of Hollywood's inspirational kitsch, they also inspire significant public resentment. It is no easy task to sort out the real opposition to the teachers' position from the muddle of anti-unionism and taxpayer angst.

With a new school year under way and a contract now ratified, the dust has all but settled on this dispute in Saskatchewan. Yet teachers' enduring fight for public esteem remains unresolved.

To start, the idea that teachers are merely glorified babysitters, while not always put this blatantly, persists, particularly for the area of teaching where the concentration of women is greatest: primary education. Like any other schoolyard taunt that sticks, the charge that teachers are babysitters succeeds by disarming its target. Engaging this remark sets a trap that teachers cannot afford to fall into: proclaiming their superiority to others who care for children, while denying certain undeniable aspects of their jobs. Were teaching a male-identified profession, it would not likely be confused with babysitting.

Teaching, along with nursing and social work, is considered a "caring profession," so named for its presumed affinity with women's traditional work as caregivers within the family. Today's employer benefits from the historic equation of teaching with women's work, which continues to colour every conversation about the status of teaching.

There is a vast reservoir of history tapped by the seemingly offhand babysitting remark. In the late 19th century, with the introduction of mandatory public education and the proliferation of one-room schoolhouses, the demand for a vast reserve of teachers ran up against pressures to rein in wages. As the opening quote suggests, educational overseers struck gold by exploiting two of the prevailing truths about women: that they were better suited to everything child related, including early education, and that they could (and should) be paid less. This discovery by state employers opened the doors to skilled employment for working-class and lower-middle-class women. It also pushed many "lady principals" and headmistresses out of their positions as sole proprietors into waged teaching environments run by male authorities. This period has been characterized as the "proletarianization" of the teacher labour force.

As women became the predominant workforce in state-run primary schools, teaching itself was transformed. The classroom became subject to external control as bureaucratic school structures and hierarchies were installed, relegating women to lower-paying junior positions, while men were employed as senior teachers, principals and inspectors. Further reforms included more subjects being taught, larger schools, more pupils, ever-increasing workloads, additional supervisory duties outside the classroom, and teacher evaluations based on student performance. Many of these early reforms continue to structure the experience of both female and male teachers.

Prior to the advent of public schools, men enjoyed autonomy and flexibility in their classrooms, moving easily between teaching and other responsibilities, such as farm



## Children may be politically useful as a rhetorical device, but they are not a political force or priority – references to their status as our most valuable resource and other clichés notwithstanding.

work, or using it as a stepping stone to more lucrative careers in the church and public office. As teaching lost autonomy and status, men began to quit teaching in favour of better opportunities.

The “lady teacher” was a controversial figure, simultaneously idealized for her nurturing and genteel character and subjected to pejorative depictions as uneducated and unserious. To facilitate the aggressive recruitment of women, a public accustomed to patriarchal roles had to be reassured that women were not taking jobs from the legitimate heads of households or destroying the family. Female teachers were, therefore, regulated in everything from morality to dress and, until the 1940s, were required to resign once married.

Today even the most debased corners of the blogosphere are not so crassly sexist as to suggest that elementary school teachers deserve less money because they are women. There is no need. According to Service Canada, in 2006-07 women held 87 per cent of elementary school positions and comprised 95 per cent of B.Ed. graduates concentrated in preschool and early elementary education.

Teachers would now seem to bear little resemblance to the demoralized, isolated teachers of the early 20th century. Teaching has long been one of the few ways that women could escape the occupational ghettos of their time: the factory, field or steno pool. Federations and unions have provided the main arsenal in the struggle to improve teachers’ wages, benefits, status and working conditions. Nonetheless, the issue of pay remains complex, partly due to the ambiguous nature of teachers’ workloads and workplace boundaries, its hierarchical authority structure and tiered pay scale. In 2006-07 the average wage for those 59 per cent of teachers employed full time was around \$47,000, while the 41 per cent without full-time status averaged \$25,000 per year.

Professionalization has been an indispensable weapon for raising the status of teaching. However, it has also been a vehicle to establish a science of teaching and to rationalize classroom instruction based on top-down, research-driven, standardized approaches, which may be of more benefit to employers and teacher educators than to teachers or students. The extent to which this is true in any particular region deserves more in-depth study than is possible here.

Professionalization has also – by necessity, some would say – distanced teaching from women’s work with children. Primary teachers’ duties, including curriculum development and delivery, orienting students to the academic system and preparing them for higher levels of education, clearly

go beyond babysitting and crowd control. Nonetheless, they remain part of the child-care circuit as a sometimes-complement, sometimes-alternative to other caregivers. Teachers relate to the whole child, optimally at least, and performing pseudo-parental tasks is unavoidable. Further, cultivating artistic expression, emotional strength, pro-social values and a critical intellect would seem to be part of child development no matter whose hands do the moulding: teacher, parent or daycare worker. Teachers can have a leadership role in this undertaking, not just with children, but with parents.

The justification for pay increases is further frustrated by the fact that teaching participates in a narrative of service and self-sacrifice. Those who work with children, which is said to be its own reward, are subject to a peculiar sort of valorization that is offered in place of pay. It is another trap.

The plight of teachers, then, is characteristic of the widespread demotion of female-identified work, especially that involving children. Children may be politically useful as a rhetorical device, but they are not a political force or priority – references to their status as our most valuable resource and other clichés notwithstanding. The broader challenge is to resist the downgrading of child care and education generally, including the notion that this work is the sole domain and gift of women. ⑥



## Thank you.

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*See also our list of Sustaining Subscribers on page 43.*





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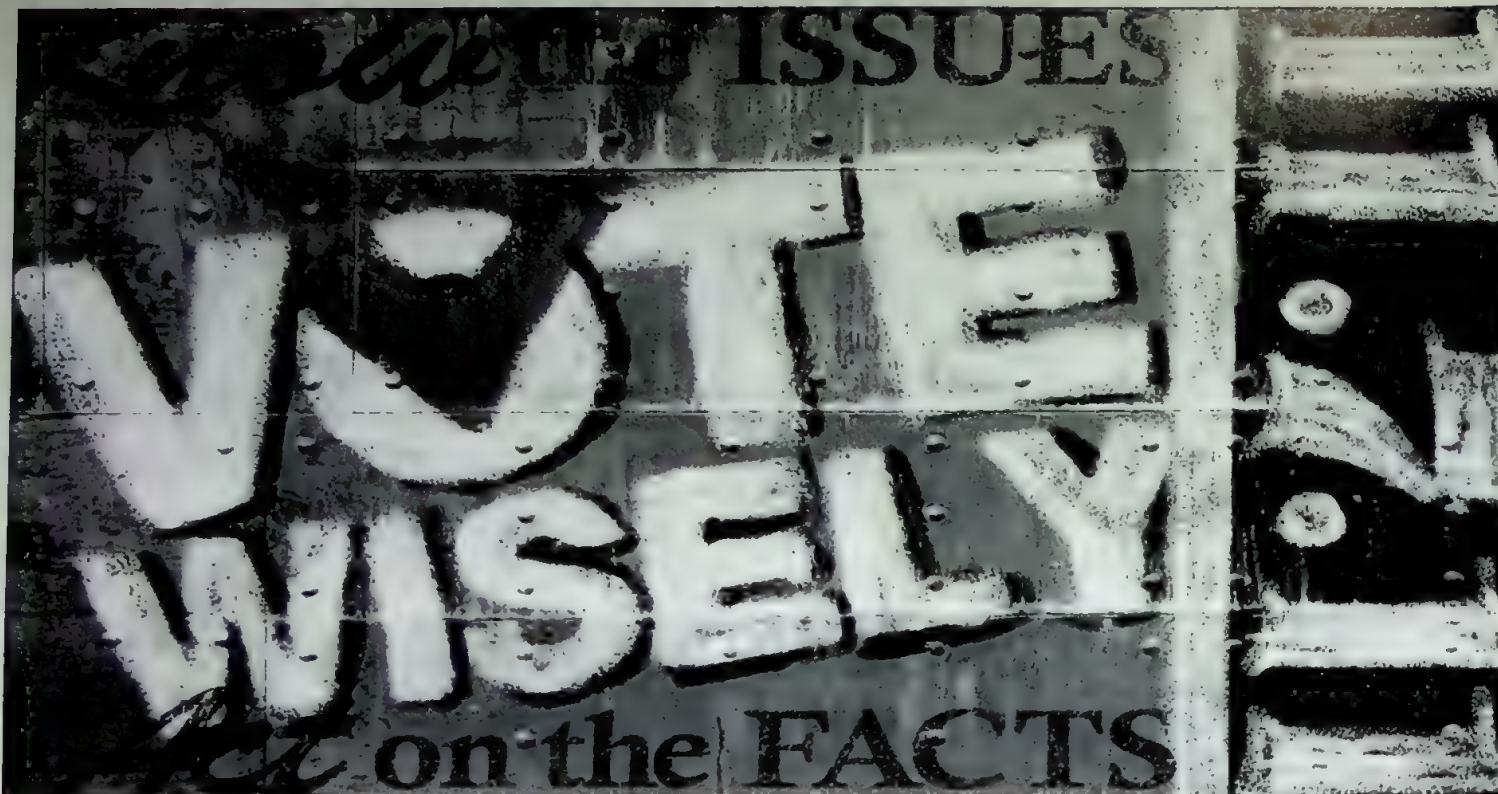
In June 1936, country elevator and head office employees of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool founded the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Employees Association (SWPEA). The main objectives of the new organization were to improve working conditions, negotiate for better wages, obtain relief from exposure to grain dust, and establish a pension plan for employees.

**A lot has changed in the past 75 years, and so have we.**

Today the name of the union - Grain and General Services Union (ILWU • Canada) - reflects the diverse membership and acknowledges an affiliation with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union - Canada. We represent workers in a wide variety of occupations ranging from journalists and accountants to fish processors and grain terminal workers.

As we celebrate our 75th anniversary we are proud of the trust our members have given us over the decades and we remain dedicated to serving them.



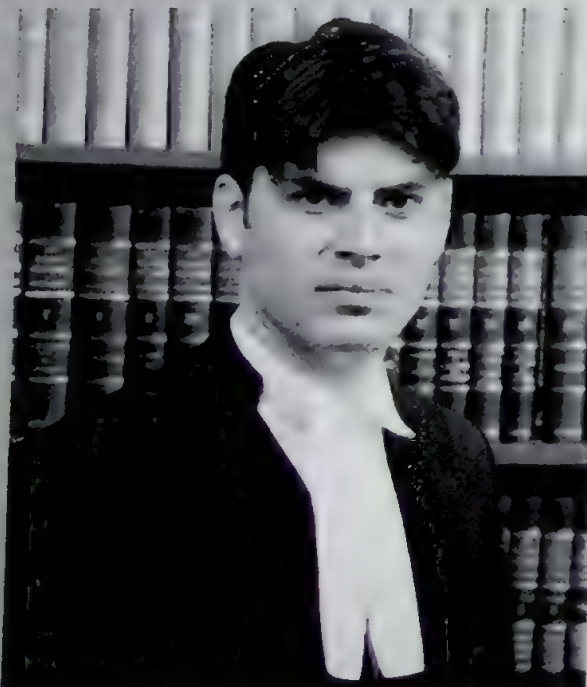


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# QUOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND



## Wise words

"On November 28, 1990, the Argentine papers published a pearl of wisdom from a union leader now in political office. This is how Luis Barrionuevo explained his sudden fortune: 'You don't make money by working.'"

EDUARDO GALEANO

## Collective power

"We dream that when we work hard, we'll be able to clothe our children decently, and still have a little time and money left for ourselves. And we dream that when we do as good as other people, we get treated the same, and that nobody puts us down because we are not like them... Then we ask ourselves, 'How could we make these things come true?' And so far we've come up with only two possible answers: win the lottery, or organize. What can I say, except that I have never been lucky with numbers."

IRMA, A FILIPINA WORKER IN THE SILICON VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

"Power lies in unity and hope lies in defiance."

STRIKING CHINESE WORKERS AT KOK INTERNATIONAL

## Interregnum

"The old is dying and the new cannot be born. In this interregnum, there rises a great diversity of morbid symptoms."

ANTONIO GRAMSCI

"The interval between the decay of the old and the formation and establishment of the new constitutes a period of transition which must always necessarily be one of uncertainty, confusion, error, and wild and fierce fanaticism."

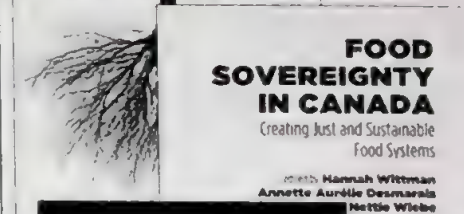
JOHN CALHOUN

"God is dead. Marx is dead. And I don't feel so well myself."

WOODY ALLEN

*Suggestions for Quotes from the Underground are welcome and can be sent to editor@briarpatchmagazine.com*

## NEW BOOKS!



### Community Organizing:

**A Holistic Approach by Joan Kuyek**

9781552664445 \$24.95

Provides strategies to build movements from the community to assert democratic political power and tools to create a culture of hope in this time of despair.

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### Men & Women and Tools:

**Bridging the Divide by Marcia Braundy**

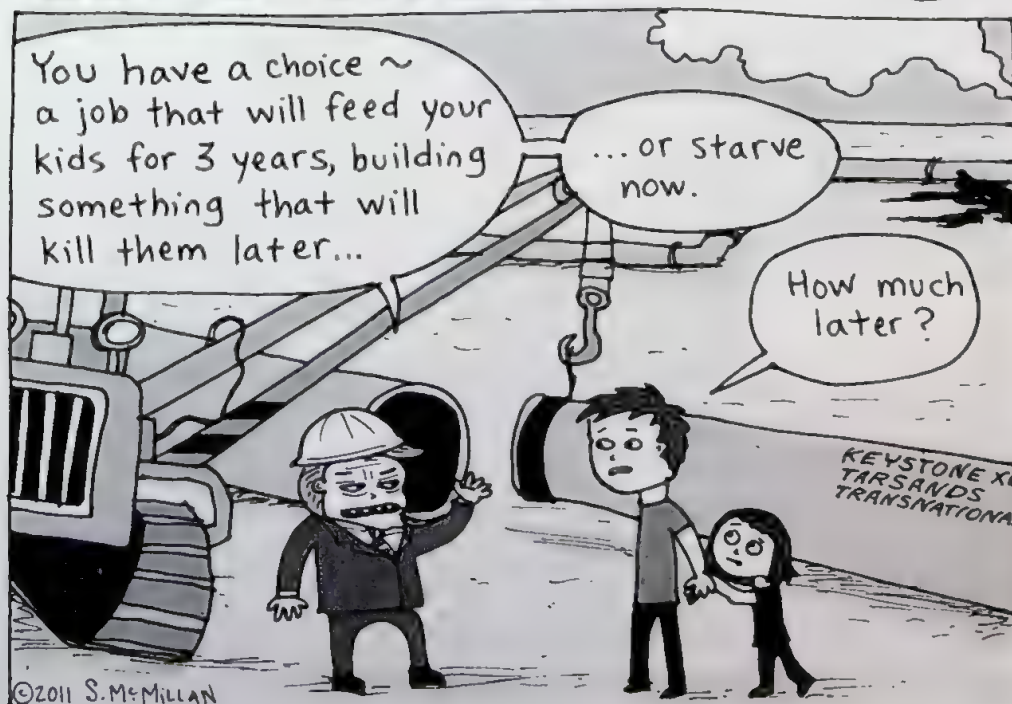
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Canadian women still represent less than 3 percent of trades workers. Braundy explores this issue by focusing on male resistance to the inclusion of women in this work.

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## CODE GREEN

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## Deeper Roots: Celebrating Briarpatch's community- supported media campaign!

Last spring *Briarpatch* launched a campaign to double our Sustaining Subscriber base. At the end of its first year, the Deeper Roots campaign proved to be a **walloping success**, bringing in **almost \$16,000 in annual revenue**.

Thanks to the almost 100 readers who started or increased their monthly donations over the past year, ***Briarpatch* is now more resilient than ever!**

If you haven't had a chance to sign up, there's still time! We'll continue to offer a copy of *Censored 2011*, a collection of the top 25 news stories from the past year that were censored by the mainstream press, to all new Sustainers of \$25 or more for as long as supplies last.

**Community-Supported Media.**  
Good for you, good for us.

SUSTAINER PROFILE #11:

### Sharmeen Khan

*Sharmeen first got involved with alternative media at the age of 18 when she began writing for Briarpatch, and soon after joined the board of directors. Fifteen years later, Sharmeen is something of a*



*mover and shaker in the world of alternative media as a founding member of the journal Upping the Anti, a board member of the Media Co-op, and a broadcaster on Toronto's CHRY 105.5 FM. Sharmeen blames her fetish for radical media on her early years with Briarpatch, and we're more than happy to take the credit!*

#### What do you do for fun?

I go to a lot of concerts. I'm also learning to play the banjo. And I play Settlers of Catan.

#### What's your favourite book?

*The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy for fiction. All of Franz Fanon's writing for the geeky theory.

#### What do you like most about *Briarpatch*?

Diverse writing that introduces me to writers I haven't heard before. The cover design and artwork are amazing as well.

#### And least?

At times the articles are too short and don't push issues enough. I also feel that the website could be developed to be more of a resource and a place for readers to interact and learn.

#### How long have you been reading *Briarpatch*?

Fifteen years! *Briarpatch* has been part of my life since I first became radicalized in Regina. I can't say enough about how influential it has been in my life. It was really hard growing up as a woman of colour in Regina and not having a large community to learn from about radical politics, Marxism, feminism and anti-racism. The accessibility of *Briarpatch* and all the people involved with it gave me a sense of belonging.

#### Tell us more about your early years with the magazine.

My first article in *Briarpatch* was about growing up Muslim in Regina. There was no other avenue to express those sentiments and ideas, and to have older activists encourage me to write. This was before the time of blogs, and it meant so much to me to have my voice in print and distributed. It felt validating, and I learned a lot from the process. When I left Regina in 1998 I remained a subscriber, and sometimes a contributor. But my brief time at *Briarpatch* influenced me to continue writing for feminist magazines and get into alternative media. Fifteen years later, I'm still active with the work. I'm happy to be in a position to be a sustainer and encourage *Briarpatch*'s work.

### Yes! Sign me up as a Briarpatch Sustainer.

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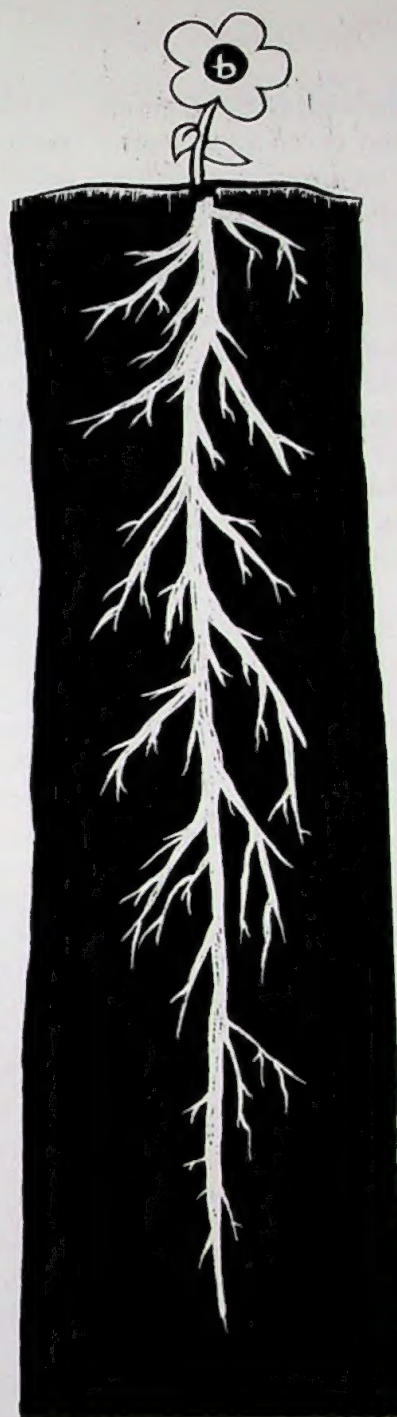
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# "The best game you can name"

*Hockey is no stranger to militarism, but radical fans aren't about to call the game*

By Sheldon Birnie

Fifteen thousand people pack the seats of the sold-out MTS Centre in Winnipeg. They cheer wildly as the home team Jets rush the puck up through the neutral zone. Cheers erupt louder still as shots are fired on goal, bodies slammed brutally into boards, and pucks are buried deep in the visitor's net.

Players hustle back and forth over the ice in jerseys emblazoned with the symbol of a fighter jet atop a red maple leaf, circled in white and blue. According to Mark Chipman, chairman and governor of the Winnipeg-based True North Sports & Entertainment, the logo was designed not only as an homage to the "rich history and relationship" between the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and the City of Winnipeg, but also in direct consultation with the Department of National Defence.

Since the new logo was announced in July, merchandise bearing the new design has flown off the shelves of local retailers, providing support for the local club as well as a surge of positive, free publicity for RCAF.

"The logo seems to be some sort of hybrid between an F-18, an F-16 and an F-27," observes Chris Hannah, rabid hockey fan and member of Winnipeg punk band Propagandhi. Hannah, the son of a Cold War fighter pilot, first learned to play hockey on an RCAF base in rural Manitoba at age five. As Hannah says, the jet depicted in the logo is "a machine that's built to secure geopolitical interests by destroying the infrastructure and people that stand in its way. It's no different than a machine gun."

Unfortunately, professional sports are no stranger to militarization. With its focus on discipline, heavy hitting and physical violence, hockey is no exception. NHL teams have long hosted military appreciation nights, though they have become much more elaborate spectacles of late. At the most recent NHL awards at the Palms Hotel in Las Vegas, U.S. army officers rappelled from the rafters at one point during the ceremonies.

Television commentator Don Cherry is perhaps the most blatant example of how militarism has fully ingrained itself into our country's hockey culture. Cherry regularly follows his tough-guy coaching commentary with a blanket endorsement of support for Canadian troops fighting in Afghanistan on his weekly *Coach's Corner*, broadcast during CBC's *Hockey Night in Canada*.

"I think it's fine to remember these soldiers who have passed away," says Joey Keithley, of legendary punk act D.O.A., a veteran recreation league hockey player and anti-war activist. "Fair enough, right? But when you see the Dominion Lending commercial 'Don Cherry knows dogs, Don Cherry knows hockey,' it should come with a caveat: 'Don Cherry knows fuck all about politics!'"

Despite the "rock 'em, sock 'em" propaganda espoused by commentators like Cherry and the nationalistic rhetoric in which much of the game is shrouded, professional hockey still holds a strong appeal for radical and left-wing fans of the sport. Cultural icons like the late CBC broadcaster Peter Gzowski described hockey as "the game of our lives," while the hockey chronicles of Dave Bidini, founding member of the Rheostatics, wax poetic on the beauty of a borderless culture of hockey, a global community united by a love for the game.

"Hockey is a captivating sport," says author and activist Yves Engler. Based out of Montreal, Engler is a Canucks fan at heart, a loyalty he shares with Keithley.

Engler is no stranger to the inner workings of the competitive hockey system, having played Junior A hockey until the age of 19 against the likes of current NHLers Scott Gomez and Michael Ryder. Engler later quit hockey and became heavily involved in radical student politics at Concordia University.

"I recognize that politically, professional hockey has some major downsides," Engler says, "But on the level of kids playing sports and the camaraderie, it's a very good thing."

Cashing in on the fervent nationalism embodied in the Vancouver Olympics, the annual World Junior Championships, and the last Stanley Cup finals, conservative commentators have succeeded in further entrenching the "hockey is life" trope into the dominant national discourse. By branding "conservative values" as part and parcel of "the game of our lives" – whether by Cherry's weekly warmongering or by rebranding the Winnipeg Jets – conservatives have scored another point in their ongoing effort to realize the slogan they so champion: "Canadian values are conservative values."

But the game isn't over for either conservative or radical hockey fans. While the new Jets logo and the increasing militarization may leave some fans feeling as though they "simply aren't welcome at the rink," as John K. Samson, Jets fan and co-founder of Arbeiter Ring Publishing, put it, there is no need to call the game yet.

While the odds seem to be stacked heavily against a leftist hockey narrative, there is nothing more exciting in hockey than an underdog coming from behind to topple an arrogant, top-seeded team.

By continuing to challenge the sinister influence of un-bridled militarism masquerading as harmless sport – whether on blogs, in print or song, or simply on TV in a living room or bar – radical hockey fans can certainly still come from behind and, with luck, hard work and perseverance, survive to play the game again and win in a rink where all fans are welcome. ❧



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